Communication in a rhetorical corporation: an ethnographic study of change from hierarchy to self-managed teams

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Communication in a rhetorical corporation:
   An ethnographic study of change
   from hierarchy to self-managed teams

by

Jane M. Perkins

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

1995

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For Bruce, Elizabeth, Meredith
Jeff, BJ, and Anthony
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The basic question is neither the moral uncertainty involved in telling stories about how other people live nor the epistemological one involved in casting those stories in scholarly genres—both of which are real enough, are always there, and go with the territory. The problem is that now that such matters are coming to be discussed in the open, rather than covered over with a professional mystique, the burden of authorship seems suddenly heavier. Once ethnographic texts begin to be looked at as well as through, once they are seen to be made, and made to persuade, those who make them have rather more to answer for.

Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*

In terms of the future, our link to the past must be broken experientially by reversing our methodological practices. Such reversals would foster ethnographies of intimacy, not distance; of stories, not models; of possibilities, not stabilities; and of contingent understandings, not detachable conclusions.

John Van Maanen
Peter K. Manning
Marc L. Miller

Editor's Introduction to Dan Rose's

*Living the Ethnographic Life*
I. INTRODUCING

Today's global economic dance is no Strauss waltz. It's break dancing accompanied by street rap. The effective firm is much more like Carnival in Rio than a pyramid along the Nile.

Tom Peters
*Liberation Management*

With little precedent to guide them, managers are watching hierarchy fade away and the clear distinctions of title, task, department, even corporation, blur. Faced with extraordinary levels of complexity and interdependency, they watch traditional sources of power erode and the old motivational tools lose their magic.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter
"The New Managerial Work"

What counts are not the company's buildings or machines, but the contacts and power of its marketing and sales force, the organizational capacity of its management, and the ideas crackling inside the heads of its employees.

Alvin Toffler
*Powershift*

Based on my three-year ethnographic study, this dissertation tells the story of the owners and employees of a spin-off company in the continual process of defining and redefining, implementing, assessing, and negotiating their team-based or self-managed corporate approach for conducting business. As traditional hierarchies are leveled and power relationships are shifted—from relatively stable structures of command and control to more flexible human relationships of negotiation and interaction—these rhetors are challenged by altered audience relationships, new purposes, evolving processes, and innovative formats. From the beginning of my research and throughout this dissertation, I focus on the corporation's communication, and question, in particular, how communication—both oral and written—is creating a team-based corporate structure and how that corporate structure is changing communication.
Primary Arguments

Consistent with ethnographic tradition, my research of VisionCorps\(^1\) was prompted—not by a theory or hypothesis that needed testing, a research agenda that needed proving, or even a problem that needed solving—but by a hunch that I and my professional communication readers could learn from studying this corporate culture(s), especially from my focus on communication. Therefore, to help guide my readers, I forecast my primary arguments that have grown from my research; they are not prior to it. I argue the following two main points throughout.\(^2\)

First, changes in corporate structure and management philosophies— influenced and enabled by technological innovation—are significantly affecting corporate communication. These changes are affecting the participants and their audiences, their communication purposes, their writing and production processes, and the formats they use. This argument builds on JoAnne Yates’ acclaimed work, *Control through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management*, which discusses the interdependency of corporate structure, management philosophy, technologies, and communication in modern corporations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Building on the symbiotic relationship she describes, I argue that if the hierarchical structure of the modern corporation is radically changing, along with management philosophies and

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\(^{1}\)All names used in this study are pseudonyms for actual people, organizations, and locations.

\(^{2}\) A third claim underpins this entire ethnography: research and pedagogy in professional communication can benefit from contextualized research such as this. This underlying claim is consistent with the "promise of twentieth-century social and cultural anthropology" or ethnography; Marcus and Fischer explain that "in using portraits of other cultural patterns to reflect self-critically on our own ways, anthropology disrupts common sense and makes us reexamine our taken-for-granted assumptions" (1).
technologies, then communication must be affected, not in a cause and effect sequence but reciprocally.

My second argument, expanding on the first and reinforcing the significance of these changes, is reflected in the title of this dissertation: *Communication in a Rhetorical Corporation*. I am suggesting that VisionCorps is an example of what I am calling a "rhetorical corporation." By applying a name to corporations involved in these significant corporate changes, I am following the practice of current theorists/consultants. Although they use the term "modern corporation" to refer universally to the *idealized* hierarchically-structured corporation that originated in the late 19th century with the railroads and that continued until creative deviations began occurring approximately fifteen years ago, these writers employ their own terms for what they believe is being created in the wake of the break-up of The Modern Corporation: “decentralized corporations,” “post-modern corporations,” “knowledge corporations.” The terms vary as each writer emphasizes a particular aspect of corporate change to reinforce his/her argument. All of these terms are appropriate, and I use them in my dissertation. However, by talking about rhetorical corporations, I am foregrounding these corporations' focus on their customers in new and inclusive ways, and their management theories that depend on communication of negotiation and interaction, rather than command and control.⁴ My term for these corporations suggests their difference from their modern predecessors—at least to some extent in both management/organizational theory and practical application. No distinct line of division exists

⁴My use of "rhetorical" emphasizes the growing awareness of some corporate members that their business—in fact, that everything—is the result of discourse, of effective communication that is interactional. Credited to the Sophists, this interpretation is also discussed in postmodern theorizing. Brown, for example, makes this designation: "While no single term can adequately describe the multitude of interests and intellectual problems associated with the postmodern temper, the term *rhetoric* is being used increasingly to do just that" (7).
between The Modern Corporation and rhetorical corporations. Nor do I mean to suggest that The Modern Corporation was not rhetorical; it isn't an either/or division. I use "rhetorical corporations" to emphasize the communicative self-awareness of owners and employees in these changing corporations. I want to focus attention on the significance of change, at least in VisionCorps, and on what might happen elsewhere when buyers/audiences motivate corporate actions and when employees, on an equal par with each other and management, know that their work depends on their rhetorical approaches and strategies. We don't actually know what rhetorical corporations are, although I will discuss changes underway from The One to the others. Current corporations are an indeterminate mix of The Modern and rhetorical features. Therefore, I'll take the labeling risk and join the efforts to introduce new ways of talking about current corporations and their communication.

To tell my story of VisionCorps or, in other words, to argue these two main points, I begin in this introduction to explain the theories and contexts in which I am writing this ethnography. In a more traditional manner, one could say that my next two main sections are an analysis and synthesis of the "literature" of interpretive ethnographers and corporate theorists/consultants, to show a need and fit for my research. However, a literature review seems to imply a static objectification of the "information" out there. Instead, I want my readers to be aware that the literature or discussions—of interpretive ethnographers and corporate theorists/consultants—are an active part of this ethnography.

These theories and contexts share a "postmodern," decentering theoretical perspective that emphasizes indeterminate change, heterogeneous interaction and juxapositioning, and the petits recits of the local rather than of a stable and
homogeneous meta-narrative. Influenced, for example, by the ideas of Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Rorty, Bakhtin, and others, the work of these interpretive ethnographers and corporate theorists/consultants comprise second-generation interpretations of postmodern theory that informs or motivates actions. Moreover, in the theoretical discussion that follows, I avoid the huge and, therefore, broadly understood classification of "postmodern." Rather, in each of the next two sections, I provide more specific theories and contexts by analyzing specific issues or key tensions before tracing connections to professional communication studies and forecasting my ethnography. In the next section, I analyze the theories and contexts of interpretive ethnographers by way of arriving at my theoretical/methodological position as an interpretive/externalist ethnographer. And in the last section of this introduction, I summarize the theories and contexts of corporate change/restructuring in which VisionCorps' cultures are situated and in which I, along with my VisionCorps' co-creators, am writing this one particular story. These two sections introduce theories and contexts, within which tensions—the four I order for each—delineate primary discussion. In the remaining four chapters of my dissertation, I pick up these tensions, merging issues of ethnography with those of corporate change, within the story of VisionCorps. This design emphasizes my self-reflection on the creation of the VisionCorps' story and the embeddedness of theory/methodology in the fieldwork and writing of interpretive ethnographies.

In addition to developing my two main arguments that
1) changes in corporate structure and management philosophies—influenced and enabled by technological innovation—are significantly affecting corporate communication
2) VisionCorps is an example of a Rhetorical Corporation
this introduction supports my underlying claim. By exploring alternatives other
than the meta-narrative of The Modern Corporation, VisionCorps' owners and
employees provide an impetus for professional communication teachers,
researchers, and practitioners. We too need to consider alternatives other than
the meta-narratives that have dominated our field in both theory and practice.
For although their union is continually messy and uneven, theory and practice are
inseparably merged. In the petits recits, the small stories—the ethnographies—
the tensions of theory and practice are told. Because it is developing in response
to, or in conjunction with, postmodern theorizing, interpretive ethnography
emphasizes reflexive tensions: the tensions of doing fieldwork, the rhetorical
tensions of writing interpretive ethnography in the academy, and the tensions
that result from ethnographic purposes of shaking assumptions and meta-
narratives. Postmodern organizational/management theory is also tension laden,
especially in efforts to "manage" what is implicitly unstable and unmanageable by
traditional standards.

Theories and Contexts of Interpretive Ethnographers
As an interpretive ethnographer, I have been aware from the beginning of
my research that I am "writing" rather than "discovering" VisionCorps. Working
in an interpretive tradition, my fieldwork methodology, theoretical perspective,
and writing are all interdependent. Furthermore, I believe, rather than analyzing
an objective, static cultural text, I am writing—through my interactions with the

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4In "On Theory, Practice, and Method: Toward a Heuristic Research Methodology for
Professional Writing," Sullivan and Porter critique the theory-practice binary that impacts
professional communication studies. They argue for research methodology as praxis which
"requires overthrowing the compartmentalization of theory, practice, and method" (231).
people and environment of multi-layered VisionCorps' cultures—a story about professional communication.

Although it does not have a lengthy ethnographic tradition, the Interpretive or Rhetorical Turn in anthropology has influenced its own and other disciplines significantly. In his *Representation in Ethnography*, a collection of essays about current representational demands on ethnographers, Van Maanen reviews the past decade of ethnographic theorizing to evaluate the state of ethnography in 1995. He begins by looking back to the time when ethnography was more exclusively anthropological and a "realist" undertaking:

Certainly for me the ethnographer's way of knowledge appeared in this dreamtime to be less arcane, more concrete, and far more intimate and respectful than count-and-classify survey work or building and testing off-the-shelf theoretical models. All that was required, it seemed, was a steady gaze and hand, a sturdy and thick notebook, and plenty of time to spare.

No more... Ethnography is no longer pictured as a relatively simple look, listen and learn procedure but, rather, as something akin to an intense epistemological trial by fire. (2)

Van Maanen characterizes much anthropological work in the wake of the "representational" or "interpretive crisis" as ethnographies of ethnographies in which existing ethnographic texts—usually those most persuasive and highly regarded—are deconstructed "to search for the ways they fail to make the points they are trying or claiming to make" (18). Because it does "remind us of the limits of representational possibilities as they make a strong argument to counter any faith in a simple or transparent world that can be known with any certainty" (18),

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5 Marcus and Fischer trace Interpretive Ethnography to cultural anthropology of the 1960s which moved away from "the attempt to construct a general theory of culture" (16) and to the work, in particular, of Geertz.

6 Geertz puts an interpretive movement into disciplinary perspective as he focuses on the issue of textualization: "A hundred and fifteen years (if we date our profession, as conventionally, from Tylor) of asseverational prose and literary innocence is long enough" (*Works* 24).
Van Maanen defends this deconstructing and theorizing. "An End to Innocence," his introductory essay to this collection, is especially valuable because it indicates the acceptance and impact of interpretive ethnography in anthropology:

Again, this reversal is not a terribly controversial issue these days—at least among practicing ethnographers. The priority of the signifier over the signified, the placing of implicit quotation marks about terms such as 'truth' and 'reality' (hedges from which these words are unlikely to ever escape), and the now problematized foundations of some of our most sacred concepts (from 'self' to 'society') are all ideas that have been absorbed and, if not canonized, at least recognized by ethnographers as presenting troublesome epistemological issues with which we as writers must in some fashion deal. (16)

In addition to his analysis of the state of ethnography, Van Maanen reinforces, reassuringly, the viability of the discipline and suggests that fieldwork is continuing in much the same ways as before.  

Anthropologists' acceptance of interpretive ethnography is significant for professional communication studies, especially for researchers writing ethnographies and for teachers, scholars, and practitioners whose work and teaching are influenced by ethnographic research. Although qualitative research in general and ethnographic research in particular are increasingly valued in professional communication, an analysis of ethnographic research conducted and published in professional communication would not support the general

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7 Other anthropologists, especially those interpretive ethnographers who are further differentiated as experimental or externalist, would not agree with Van Maanen about fieldwork practices. I expand on this issue, beginning with the subsection on "Access."

8 In his 1985 article "Nonacademic Writing: The Social Perspective," Faigley made one of the first persuasive calls for ethnographic research in professional communication studies, arguing the significance of social interactions, organizational contexts, and issues of power for understanding writing. His move has been echoed by many scholars, including Halpern who writes: "ethnography provides the most textured and complete representation of communication in action" (27). Forman, Smeltzer, Smeltzer and Thomas, and Suchan are only a few of the others who have also called for ethnographic research in professional communication studies.
acceptance of interpretive ethnography that Van Maanen believes exists in anthropology.

**Four Key Tensions**

Before I trace interpretive ethnography in professional communication and arrive at my externalist perspective, I need to introduce four key ethnographic tensions: access, textualization, ethics, and otherness. My introduction of interpretive ethnographers' discussion of these four tensions provides an explanation of interpretive ethnography as an evolving theoretical and methodological means of knowing; explains significant background for my externalist ethnographic perspective; and, most importantly, forecasts, for the chapters that follow, my specific references to these tensions in relation to my research of VisionCorps. These tensions exemplify the critical and complicated nature of ethnographic research and its potential for knowledge-making. These are not discrete but rather interrelated tensions, and together they comprise, although not inclusively or exclusively, an interpretive ethnographic approach. Like Marcus and Fischer, other anthropologists, and communication scholars, I am using "interpretive ethnography" as a "covering label" to distinguish it from "traditional," "realist" ethnography. Marcus and Fischer assert that the most distinguishable aspect of interpretive ethnography is "the present dominant interest . . . about how interpretations are constructed by the anthropologist, who works in turn from the interpretations of his informants" (26). Within interpretive ethnography, anthropologists are experimenting with many approaches; their acknowledgment of interpretive ethnography depends on how much distance from this tradition they want to establish. New ethnographic approaches and labels include, for example, "experimental," "critical," "radical," and "participatory."
explain my position within interpretive ethnography as "externalist" and discuss it further below.

**Access.** Although fieldwork may seem unchanged for practicing anthropologists, I believe that for many ethnographers in other disciplines such as professional communication—especially those without a rich fieldwork lore and without a multitude of ethnographic experiences—a turn from a realist to an interpretive perspective affects more than the "writing up." More specifically, the four ethnographic tensions I have chosen to discuss are, in fact, tensions because of this turn. Access seems the natural place to start in my discussion of ethnographic tensions since it suggests beginnings, and it also works naturally into my discussion of more specific VisionCorps' issues of access in Chapter II as I connect to corporate theorists/consultants' discussions of decentralization and build on this introductory theorizing.

At least from a realist perspective, as differentiated from an interpretive perspective, access seems only to be about Being There, about ethnographers' work in the field. The division between fieldwork and the academic writing-up, emphasized traditionally by distinct geographic locations, was reinforced when I discussed these tensions of turning from a realist to an interpretive perspective with an anthropology professor. He insisted that fieldwork and "data collection methods" for interpretive ethnography are no different from realist ethnography; for him what differs is the former's "data presentation," which emphasizes the

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9Parallel changes in corporate structures from hierarchy to team-based—my next section—also result in and are fueled by tensions of reconceptualized theories and actions.

10In *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, Geertz writes chapters titled: "Being There" and "Being Here" to describe the anthropologist's life both in "the field" and in academia.
"researcher's reflection and feelings." This argument, which separates fieldwork actions from academic writing and denies interpretive implications to fieldwork, pervades discussions of ethnography. Perhaps an explanation for what I believe to be a significant difference is that practicing anthropologists, similar to researchers in other disciplines, have been working from a more interpretive perspective than is apparent in their writing: many of them have produced both official academic versions of their fieldwork and then unofficial versions; they also are aware of and play the scientific language game to obtain research grants and to garner publications; and many anthropologists have written about the importance of informal "hall talk" for sharing personal, reflective ethnographic stories of the field. Therefore, while we may talk about an interpretive turn (similar to the way I will talk about changes toward rhetorical corporations), the turn is a turn, not a disjuncture without fore-traces and influences. And the interpretive turn is itself multi-interpreted: not all anthropologists agree, as I'll show below, that fieldwork is basically unaffected or that it should remain unchanged. My speculations fall within the realm of, as Geertz says, "matters . . . covered over with a professional mystique" (see iv). The problem, also clearly

11Comments by Dr. Shu-Min Huang, Iowa State University, December 1992.

12Geertz explains that "the difficulty is the oddity of constructing texts ostensibly scientific out of experiences broadly biographical, which is after all what ethnographers do. . ." (Works 10).

13Paul Rabinow's Fieldwork in Morocco is an excellent example of an unofficial, self-reflexive ethnographic version.

14In Chapter 8, "The Ethnographic Research Proposal," of Speaking of Ethnography, Michael Agar provides sage advice for writing competitive grant proposals, especially for funding awarded to "objective," "scientific" research.

15Anthropology's Interpretive Turn is commonly marked as the publication of Clifford and Marcus' Writing Culture, usually with nods toward Geertz as the fore-father.
divulged by Geertz, is that ethnographers realize they "have more to answer for" as a result of an interpretive turn. On the other hand, if they don't experience an interpretive turn, ethnographers may ignore tensions that guide theory and actions of access, textualization, and ethics of There and Here.

Through my experiences as an ethnographer, through conversations with other ethnographers in professional communication, and because of my composition background—because of which I interpret writing as a broadly inclusive process—it is obvious to me that writing, fieldwork, and theory are all interdependent and are acted, enacted, and experienced concurrently. For me, theoretical understanding is a continual process of reading and discussing, especially with ethnographic theorists, and of doing ethnography, of interacting with the cultural members and their environments as "we" write the culture. My fieldwork decisions are dependent, knowingly or unknowingly, on my theoretical perspective. For example, decisions about access depend on an ethnographer's theoretical perspective toward her/his relationship with cultural members.

A couple of years ago when I was in the midst of my fieldwork, I met another doctoral student who was also doing ethnography in a software development company. At that time I was fascinated (still am) by the ways the marketing representatives used the software documentation as primary sales tools. As we discussed our projects, I asked if the same thing was happening in the corporation she was studying. Her answer was a tentative "maybe." She said she thought she had seen software documentation used for marketing but couldn't be sure; since she was afraid her questions might have an impact on her research culture, she hadn't asked the questions that would help her follow up. Her fieldwork actions are as clearly influenced by her theoretical perspective as are
mine. While her fieldwork methodologies reflect her realist approach to ethnography, my interpretive approach depends on beliefs about culture and knowledge such as Clifford's: "If 'culture' is not an object to be described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitively interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal, and emergent" (19). Ethnographic issues such as access, for example, have much more significance when access means the ability to create knowledge-making interactions rather than the ability to observe and describe from an objective, neutral perspective. Interpretive ethnographers believe that access is not just gained but created. And while realist ethnographers see access as an event or threshold, interpretive ethnographers understand access as contingent and theory-dependent.

Access for interpretive ethnography is not only dependent upon personal interactions; it is always developing. Access is not just getting through the door of a corporation or sitting in on a meeting or getting people to sign a human subjects release form—although it is all of those too; it is about continually reassessing the dynamic meaning-making process of doing fieldwork/writing ethnography in the midst of the process. Rosaldo provides some explanation for this kind of interpretive ethnographic flux in which access means making the opportunities to question and create meaning:

In routine interpretive procedure, according to the methodology of hermeneutics, one can say that ethnographers reposition themselves as they go about understanding other cultures. Ethnographers begin research with a set of questions, revise them throughout the course of inquiry, and in the end emerge with different questions than they started with. One's surprise at the answer to a question, in other words, requires one to revise the question until lessening surprises or diminishing returns indicate a stopping point. (Culture 7)
Rosaldo helps me explain the interdependency of access, fieldwork, and the write up—all to make meaning, to tell stories for others. Depending on the ethnographer's developing questions and on her/his ability to ask them or to partake in the culture(s) and to follow-up with more questions or new relationships, the story, the writing of the ethnography, develops. In other words, from the very beginning of the fieldwork, or even further back to the proposal of the project, the ethnography is being written by the decisions the ethnographer makes about access: I need to attend that meeting. I need to get to know that cultural member better and to begin building a trusting relationship. I need to have access to the corporation's e-mail, preferably to all the in-house bulletin boards. I need permission to reproduce that document and to discuss it with the writers.

Ethnography is motivated by, as Agar explains, having "an idea to check out" (171) where the "goal is to understand the world of some human group" (203). The ethnographer's theoretical perspective determines how the researcher goes about that goal—in other words, how the ethnographer creates access.

Textualization. In the beginnings of interpretive ethnography—when anthropologists were first struck by the idea that what they do is write—the developing tensions of textualization tended to emphasize the self-reflections of "Being Here." However, a more inclusive interpretation of textualization also blends distinctions of There and Here, and further extends the "locations" of ethnography by rhetorically including readers as crucial to what ethnographers do.

Textualization is effective writing in the broadest sense of knowing that writing

\[In addition to blurring a theoretical distinction between There and Here, the actual sites of ethnographic research are increasingly blurred as ethnographers more commonly study, not exotic and distant cultures, but cultures within their native locales and move frequently in and out of the cultures studied.\]
and thinking, or meaning-making, are one and the same; therefore, textualization focuses awareness on a myriad of specific writing decisions. Building in particular on Geertz' theorizing about ethnographic "literariness" and on postmodern literary criticism, Clifford and Marcus' *Writing Culture* is one of the important markers to which Van Maanen refers in his analysis of the last ten years of ethnography. "Textualization," Marcus explains, "is at the heart of the ethnographic enterprise, both in the field and in university settings" (265), and Clifford stresses that "ethnography is hybrid textual activity: it traverses genres and disciplines. The essays in this volume do not claim ethnography is 'only literature.' They do insist it is always writing" (26). The crisis of representation and the discussion fueling it are causing an intensified focus on ethnography as writing and, in particular, on experimental ethnographic writing: "Elevated to a central concern of theoretical reflection, problems of description become problems of representation" (Marcus and Fischer 9).

"Textualization" may seem to bring ethnography into a more familiar relationship with the disciplines (or sub-disciplines) of composition, rhetoric, and professional communication. Although disciplinary knowledge and experience with, in particular, writing strategies may be an advantage for composition/rhetoric/professional communication ethnographers\(^\text{17}\)—especially as they typically conceptualize writing more inclusively—many disciplinary, foundational ways of knowledge-making are problematized by interpretive ethnography. For example, Tyler questions traditional modes of composition as part of the limitations of representational signification:

\(^{17}\)Notably, researchers such as Forman make this connection; she argues that professional communication studies could benefit from composition studies' research, especially from qualitative research. She also suggests that researchers trained in composition have an affinity for doing ethnography.
The problem with the realism of natural history is not, as is often claimed, the complexity of the so-called object of observation, nor failure to apply sufficiently rigorous and replicable methods, nor even less the seeming intractability of the language of description. It is instead a failure of the whole visualist ideology of referential discourse, with its rhetoric of 'describing,' 'comparing,' 'classifying,' and 'generalizing,' and its presumption of representational signification. (130)

Ironically, even though interpretive ethnographers are always aware of their writing and what they are doing with their writing that requires them to consider composition strategies, they also consciously craft their writing in ways other than what is considered classical or traditional in composition studies or rhetorical analysis. They aim to reconfigure genres, especially ethnographic genres, and to push their writing in creative directions that announce to readers its impact rather than its neutrality and distinguish it from the traditional. And while this textualization may be considered a difficult burden for ethnographers, Clifford emphasizes its benefits:

Once cultures are no longer prefigured visually—as objects, theatres, texts—it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. In a discursive rather than a visual paradigm, the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye and toward expressive speech (and gesture). The writer's 'voice' pervades and situates the analysis, and objective, distancing rhetoric is renounced. (12)

The cultural members' voices are the primary concern of other anthropologists, those usually labeled "experimental."

Tyler sums up the rhetorical nature of textual awareness that is dependent on interactions between the ethnographer and cultural members and the ethnographer and readers: "The point is that questions of form are not prior, the form itself should emerge out of the joint work of the ethnographer and his native
partners. The emphasis is on the emergent character of textualization, textualization being just the initial interpretive move that provides a negotiated text for the reader to interpret" (127). Although ethnographers usually learn the trade from studying other ethnographies, an interpretive perspective cannot rely on models or genres of interpretive ethnographies; the uniqueness of the situated research and the rhetorical situation are important aspects of interpretive ethnography.

While few textual generalities exist among interpretive ethnographies, the researchers share a belief that narrative is integral to textualization. As Clifford explains, this narrative perspective is theoretically dependent because "the current turn to rhetoric coincides with a period of political and epistemological reevaluations in which the constructed, imposed nature of representational authority has become unusually visible and contested. Allegory prompts us to say of any cultural description not 'this represents, or symbolizes, that' but rather, 'this is a (morally charged) story about that'" (100). Interpretive ethnographers make innumerable representational, rhetorical, and compositional decisions about their narratives. Never, however, do they believe narrative is "merely ornamental, a dab of local color" (Rosaldo *Culture* 143) or an instrument for emphasizing the "researcher's reflection and feelings." When anthropologists believe that what they do is write stories, their work is flooded by narratological questions—for example, What is the author's function and how is s/he represented in the text? Although many ethnographic theorists place experimental ethnography within, or developing from, the broader movement of interpretive ethnography, experimentalists, in particular, are concerned about the differences
between the ethnographer's or the analyst's narratives and those of the cultural members.\(^{18}\)

Thus from a discussion of textualization, the interdependency of the whole ethnographic endeavor becomes more apparent—tensions of fieldwork and access are further merged with those of the writing up and textualization. In addition to access and textualization, ethics is also interdependent in interpretive ethnography. As Marcus asserts, "In this literary treatment of ethnography more is at stake than the mere demystification of past dominant conventions of representation" (Clifford and Marcus 263).

**Ethics of Interpretation.** To show the interrelatedness of Being There and Being Here, I continue to problematize this separation and the reductive, linear thinking and approach that can result. However, I also continue using Geertz's terms to emphasize the pervasive importance of ethics in interpretive ethnography. When ethnographers realize that they are interpreting culture rather than objectively recording it, they become aware of the ethical tensions and ramification of their actions—both Here (later in this sub-section I analyze discussions about the ethics of writing ethnography in the academy) and There (in the next sub-section I focus on the ethical tensions of conducting fieldwork research).

Working within the pervasive metanarrative of objectivity, academic researchers have not often needed to trouble themselves with ethical dilemmas beyond acquiring signatures on human subjects' release forms. To be sure, many social scientists, such as anthropologists who daily interact with cultural

\(^{18}\)In *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, Marcus and Fischer explain their interpretation of the relationship between interpretive ethnography and experimental ethnography.
members in the field, have been aware of the inappropriateness and potential hazards of a research approach shrouded in a philosophy of neutrality and objective separation. Interpretive ethnography, however, places ethics at center stage. The interpretive ethnographer's dilemma doesn't concern objectivity but ethics. Geertz describes this change as an epistemological issue for ethnographers who realize their research is not "a matter of how to prevent subjective views from coloring objective facts" but "a matter of how best to get an honest story honestly told" (Works 9). "One of the major assumptions upon which anthropological writing rested until only yesterday, that its subjects and its audience were not only separate but morally disconnected, that the first were to be described but not addressed, that the second informed but not implicated, has fairly well dissolved" (Geertz Works 132). Interpretive ethnographers' ethical awareness is further explained by the questions Geertz poses to mark an epistemological change in social research:

At the same time as the moral foundations of ethnography have been shaken by decolonialization on the Being There side, its epistemological foundations have been shaken by a general loss of faith in received stories about the nature of representation, ethnographic or any other, on the Being Here side. . . . anthropologists have had added to their 'Is it decent?' worry (Who are we to describe them?) an 'Is it possible?' one (Can Ethiopian love be sung in France?), with which they are even less well prepared to deal. How you know you know is not a question they have been used to asking in other than practical, empiricist terms: What is the evidence? How was it collected? What does it show? How words attach to the world, texts to experience, works to lives, is not one they have been used to asking at all. (Works 135)

In this quotation, Geertz writes first of Being There ethical tensions; these tensions of otherness are motivated by charges of anthropological colonialism/imperialism that rob "informants" of their cultures and demean them
by silencing their voices. These charges spur anthropologists in their epistemological rethinking in ways that scholars of postmodern theory in other disciplines can only imagine. Other scholars can more comfortably ignore what anthropologists cope with as a heavy historical burden. However, in my fieldwork/writing, I have begun to understand the ethical tensions of Being There, and I now realize that the ethics of colonialism are also very much mine, as they are any ethnographer's. While sympathy for third-world cultural others is easy, professional communication scholars often find it rather more difficult to empathize with members of corporate cultures. Some would argue that, because corporate cultures are part of our city, state or some other national designation, the cultural members are not "other" and, therefore, ethical tensions of Being There do not apply. However, just as many ethnographers believe that they don't objectively observe a culture, they also believe that cultural identity and membership are much more complex. Interpretive ethnographers believe that, rather than discovering an intact culture for study, they designate or distinguish cultures of study, cultures that are overlapping and are layered. Presumed cultural membership—for example, that defined by shared national borders, does not eradicate ethical tensions of Being There. The theoretical/methodological analogy holds; if professional communication embraces ethnography as a way of knowing, implicated in this knowledge-making are all the ethical dilemmas of anthropology, including the implications of colonialism. My next section on "Cultural Others" focuses more on the ethics of Being There.

Although the Being Here otherness—specifically about writing ethnography for others in academic disciplines upon which political considerations of publication and promotion hinge—is explored by Agar (Speaking of Ethnography), Goodall
(Casing a Promised Land), and Marcus ("Afterward: Ethnographic Writing and Anthropological Careers"), discussions of these ethical dimensions more typically involve issues of believability and locate ethical responsibility with the researcher rather than the academy. Researchers' ethical responsibilities to their readers, especially their academic colleagues, is then implicated in epistemological issues. For example, in composition studies or literary studies, as in most scholarship, researchers are ethically responsible to their "others Here" in the form of citing to give credit to textual others upon whom ideas and claims are built; in experimental or scientific models of composition research, detailed methodologies establish credibility for readers. In both of these examples, readers of the research often believe—at some level—they could go to the library stacks to confirm a citation or, that with enough methodological and design specifics, they could replicate the research. In either case, readers believe the research could be "verified." Because many readers (especially in professional communication) are less familiar with reading ethnographies, and even less so with interpretive ethnographies, the credibility of the research is questioned because verifiability is less certain. However, for interpretive ethnographers, verifiability is actually a theoretical non-issue; alternatively, researcher ethics to those professional others becomes more of an issue. Moreover, for interpretive ethnographers, no research is ever ethically neutral or rhetorically (textually) independent; researchers' ethical responsibilities are critical across the board for all methodologies. Specifically, interpretive ethnographers' credibility depends, not on any assumptions about verifiability or replicability, but on readers' belief or confidence, generated rhetorically, in the researcher's Being There. For Geertz and interpretive ethnographers, "this capacity to persuade readers (most of them academic, virtually all of them at
least part-time participants in that particular form of existence evasively called 'modern') that what they are reading is an authentic account by someone personally acquainted with how life proceeds in some place, at some time, among some group is the basis upon which anything else ethnography seeks to do—analyze, explain, amuse, disconcert, celebrate, edify, excuse, astonish, subvert—finally rests" (Works 143).

Dependent on the same epistemological and ethical considerations of the Being Here that Geertz explicates, Rabinow and Sullivan write from a more critical interpretive approach, foregrounding the cultural other in meaning-making and ethnographic responsibilities:

This thesis is a challenge to the tradition of discourse in the social sciences and the humanities which denies, ironically enough, its own moral-practical, historical location. It also directly challenges the contemporary disciplinary organization of knowledge, the structuring and definition of academic inquiry. For modern disciplines reflect and enact in their practices our culture's commitment to the belief that cognitive analysis and normative judgment can be clinically severed. It follows from these dominant values that the validity of inquiry is thought to be wholly independent of the historical and practical context of research, that social truths are easily divisible from morality and power. (21)

Along with many "experimental" ethnographers, Rabinow recognizes interdisciplinary connections in a critical perspective that includes "anthropologists, critics, feminists, and critical intellectuals" and opens the discussion to "all concerned with questions of truth and its social location; imagination and formal problems of representation; domination and resistance; the ethical subject and techniques for becoming one" ("Representations" 256).19

19See Blyler and Thralls' Professional Communication: The Social Perspective for similar descriptions of theoretical perspectives in professional communication studies.
Rabinow and Sullivan argue for the pervasiveness of ethical tensions of knowledge-making when ethnographers, actually all those involved in "academic inquiry," work from an interpretive perspective. Rabinow and Sullivan also blend ethical distinctions, explaining that cultural beliefs, theoretical perspectives, or epistemologies are the basis of ethical tensions of There and Here. By focusing on cultural others, Rabinow directs ethical discussions to include tensions of authority, or authorship, and power.20

**Cultural Others.** Following in the wake of the interpretive/rhetorical turn with its epistemological rethinkings and ethics of representation, interpretive—and especially experimental—ethnographers shift emphasis or add a further ethical dimension of Being There, of preoccupation with, as Rabinow says, "the relations of power and discourse that obtain between the anthropologist and the people with whom he/she works" ("Representations" 251). Their departure from realist ethnography lies not only in textual representation but in their relationships with cultural others. Rabinow and Rose speak for ethnographers especially concerned about the "relations of power whereby one portion of humanity can select, value and collect the pure products of others," a research practice that "need[s] to be criticized and transformed" (Rose 38).

Interpretive ethnographers believe that a postmodern perspective provides the much-called-for "transformation." Tyler asserts that fieldwork and relationships with cultural others21 are changed because "post-modern

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20Geertz and Rabinow, among others, are significant contributors to discussions of authorship and representation in ethnographic writing. Although they work in the same theoretical terrain, Geertz foregrounds the responsibilities of the ethnographer as author; Rabinow focuses on the interactions of cultural others in authorship.

21In realist ethnography, cultural others, or cultural members, are usually referred to as "informants" as if they were giving up objective data to the ethnographer.
ethnography privileges 'discourse' over 'text,' [because] it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendental observer. In fact, it rejects the ideology of 'observer-observed,' there being nothing observed and no one who is observer. There is instead the mutual, dialogical production of a discourse, of a story of sorts" (126). An interpretive/experimental approach explodes the idea of the ethnographer as a neutral, unobtrusive observer. Even though ethnographic research does not manipulate the culture or set up artificial situations, the researcher always affects the culture and its members. Therefore, the researcher is always ethically involved.

But ethnographers' concerns for cultural others is only one aspect of the ethical tensions of Being There. Interpretive/experimental ethnographers are motivated to experiment textually—to alter realist and even interpretive ethnography—because of their desire for "the adequate representation of other voices or points of view across cultural boundaries" (Marcus and Fischer 1). Interpretive/experimental ethnographers' interactions with cultural others are guided by their efforts to represent the cultural others' voices in their ethnographic writing. Their ethnographic experimentation is spurred by efforts to avoid colonialistic or neo-colonialistic research habits and representation. Marcus and Fischer describe colonialist philosophy, which is so antithetical to interpretive/experimental ethnographers, as the belief that "'the white man's burden' was to rescue these latter-day people from centuries of decay, disease, ignorance, and political corruption. Their own views were of interest only in the same way as was a child's whom one wished to educate: as a means of teaching them the truth" (2).
Arguing for non-conventional forms of writing that allow equality of voices rather than their domination, Marcus and Fischer caution that "rhetorical totalitarianism" results when "these subjects, who must be spoken for, are generally located in the world dominated by Western colonialism or neocolonialism; thus, the rhetoric is itself an exercise in power, in effect denying subjects the right to express contrary views, by obscuring from the reader recognition that they might view things with equal validity, quite differently from the writer" (1). In reaction to these compelling motivations, new and experimental ethnographic writing reinforces the centrality of textual decisions and demands additional stylistic variations. And further complicates ethnographers' research/writing.

In the same way that ethnographers have traditionally learned from examples of classic ethnographies, students of interpretive ethnography, and all its variations, learn from exemplars and now, in addition, from the ethnographies of ethnographies and the theoretical discussions of doing ethnography. Prophetically, Rose suggests that students "will conceptualize fieldwork differently than now. Above all, their inquiry might well have to acquire a narrative sort of quality, that is, students will seek to place themselves in unfolding situations, to live through complex ongoing events—the stuff of stories—rather than looking alone for the meaning of gestures, the presentations of selves, class relations, the meaning of rituals, or other abstract, analytical category phenomena on which we historically have relied" (58; italics in original). In addition, he encourages students to do "radical ethnography, one that gets you closer to those you study at the risk of going native and never returning; it is hoped, at least, that you will not again embrace the received assumptions with which you, inheriting your academic texts, methods, and corporate academic culture, began" (12). While this tolerance
and, in fact encouragement, for experimentation is aimed specifically at eliciting and representing the cultural other's voice, it edges interpretive ethnography in other new directions.

Anthropologists are reconsidering, in particular, the ideas of unified and easily-circumscribed cultures. "At a theoretical level," Rosaldo speculates, "the discipline could remake itself in order to consider not only separate cultures in separate rooms but also multiple cultures in the same room" ("Whose" 529). This rethinking supports the move toward more critical ethnographies of relationships among multiple cultures within cultures and discusses issues of power, domination, and, of course, representation. Anthropologists' moves toward critical ethnography overlap their research interests with scholars in many disciplines—including English and professional communication—where cultural studies and social perspectives are growing research interests. Not unhappy with this merging of interests in cultural studies, as he says some anthropologists are, Rosaldo is optimistic about the research focus in a movement in which "anthropologists have lost their monopoly on the concept of culture, and in the process the concept itself has been transformed. It no longer seems possible to study culture as an objectified thing or as a self-enclosed, coherent, patterned field of meaning" ("Whose" 526).

In this more open interpretation of culture where ethnographers agonize about representing others—There and Here—many interpretive ethnographers evoke the language and communication theory of Bakhtin. They theorize about their communication as interactional, their resultant knowledge-making as dialogic, and their representations as multi-vocal. Similar to Bakhtin's recurring theme of otherness, interpretive ethnographers write about the tensions between
individual authority and our heteroglossic way of knowing. Employing a jazz metaphor common in postmodern theorizing, Rose emphasizes the tensions of otherness for his critical perspective. Quoting from Szwed in *World Literature Today*, he writes:

The esthetics of jazz demand that a musician play with complete originality, with an assertion of his own musical individuality . . . . At the same time jazz requires that musicians be able to merge their unique voices in the totalizing, collective improvisations of polyphony and heterophany. The implications of this esthetic are profound and more than vaguely threatening, for no political system has yet been devised with social principles which regard maximal individualism within the framework of spontaneous egalitarian interaction. Then when Europeans and white Americans embrace the music, they also commit a political act of far more radical dimensions than that of espousing a new political ideology. (40)

Although interpretive ethnography involves other tensions, the ones I have developed in these four sub-sections go a long way toward

- describing this developing anthropological tradition
- explaining the theoretical/methodological background with which this ethnography is imbued
- introducing theoretical/methodological issues that I will continue to weave into the story of VisionCorps

In their efforts to add to or revise interpretive ethnography or to emphasize differences, ethnographers have applied labels like "experimental," "critical," "radical," and "participatory." I am going to contribute "externalist" to that list. I am not denying the importance of the emphasis developed in these other fine-tunings or suggesting that externalism revokes these other aspects; it offers an additional way of thinking about interpretive ethnography. Although my understanding of interpretive ethnography has derived primarily from
anthropology, I also need to explain the development of ethnography, especially interpretive ethnography, in professional communication studies. Both the tensions of anthropologists' interpretive theory/methodology and the traces of interpretive ethnography in professional communication lead to my beliefs about externalist ethnography.

**Traces of Interpretive Ethnography in Professional Communication**

At approximately the same time Clifford and Marcus' *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986) was published and became influential in anthropology, related social sciences, and the humanities with theoretical issues of interpretive ethnography, Odell and Goswami's *Writing in Nonacademic Settings* (1985) introduced Faigley's "social perspective," which calls for ethnographic research in composition and professional communication studies because "writing can be understood only from the perspective of a society rather than a single individual" (535). In that same publication, Doheny-Farina and Odell introduced the basics for conducting ethnographic research, and in two frequently-referred-to articles, Doheny-Farina and Paradis, Dobrin, and Miller published the initial "ethnographies" in professional communication.

Since its significant beginning ten years ago, ethnography has been included in texts explicating composition research methodologies and has generated discussion about theoretical issues in a social perspective of professional communication. Most texts devoted to research methodologies have continued in Doheny-Farina and Odell's vein of presenting a "how-to" approach for conducting ethnographic research. In their *Composition Research: Empirical*

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*Although many traces of interpretive ethnography in professional communication studies could be more broadly included within composition studies, I'll discuss the scholarship inclusively because it all affects professional communication.*
Designs (1988), Lauer and Asher seem to credit ethnography when they characterize it as "attempts to give a rich account of the complexity of writing behavior, a complexity that controlled experiments generally cannot capture" (45). They describe ethnography in traditional, realistic fashion as "a window on culture" in which the participant observer exerts a "minimum of overt intervention" (39). Of the nine methodologies they explain, only for ethnography do they have a section titled "Difficulties and problems." They approach these "problems" from a realist rather than an interpretive perspective that abandons traditional "scientific" goals of representing an objective world. Lauer and Asher list ten problems of "representativeness, cause-and-effect judgments, and variable development." They claim that ethnographic researchers "must also be concerned about its replicability, its repeatability with the same results. And they raise questions such as the following: Will the same variables be gleaned from new settings by other observers? Will these variables remain stable over time?" (48).

In The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field (1987), North incorporates many of the knowledge-making issues that interpretive ethnographers discuss; however, his explanation is clouded by the initial problems he raises about ethnography. Ethnography, he claims, too recently founded in composition studies, has too few representative examples and also lacks a "methodological heart or center" (273). Although North quotes frequently from Geertz and generally tries to describe ethnography from an interpretive perspective, he seems to find this perspective shocking amid more "positivist-based Researcher modes": "It may help again here to characterize this brand of knowledge in fairly extreme terms, and assert the Ethnographic inquiry

23The italics indicate my interpretation and emphasis.
produces stories, fictions" (277). As he explicates ethnographic research for composition studies, he claims that, "however much they may reduce our puzzlement about the people and places studied, though, these fictions have their limits as knowledge" (278). Similar to Lauer and Asher's, North's realist position is most apparent when he cautions that the "object, at least ideally, is to (1) keep the degree of disturbance as low as possible and (2) try to account for whatever effects there are" (290). North sums up what he sees as a dismal future for ethnography by claiming that "for all its promise, then, the future of the embattled Ethnographic community cannot be all that bright. There still seems to be, among users and consumers alike, considerable confusion about what sort of authority it has" (313). North's conception of ethnography's weakness is exactly the strength that interpretive ethnographers place in self-reflexive awareness and understanding.

Also of methodological significance for understanding ethnography in professional communication is the 1992 "Special Issue: Research in Technical Communication" of Technical Communication. The editor's and contributors' aims for this issue are to provide an overview of research published in the past twenty years, to explain appropriate research methodologies so that technical communicators will be informed and critical readers, to encourage further research by technical communicators and academics, and to help establish legitimacy for the discipline based on a common body of knowledge. Implicit in many of the articles are guidelines for conducting "good" research. Although many of the contributors discuss it, ethnographic research is portrayed as even more

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24 These writers do not suggest that there are variations of ethnographic research; almost entirely, their descriptions reflect realist ethnography.
questionable than it is in more general composition research. The contributors' biases are implicit: the first writer asserts that generally "research implies the application of the scientific method" (528), and another categorizes case study and ethnography as "Low Quantitative" in comparison to the "High Quantitative" of true and quasi-experimental methods. Some of the authors grant ethnographic methodology equal value in comparison to more "scientific" methodologies; however, they are clearly writing only about realistic ethnography. For example, they insist

- on data methods that ask the "same set of questions. . .of all the interviewees" (MacNealy 535)
- that ":[t]here must be evidence that the data collected resulted in records that can be reviewed by outsiders" (MacNealy 535)
- "that confirmability demonstrates that the findings of the study could be confirmed by another, that is, the findings of the study are 'objective'" (Goubil-Gambrell 590)

Sullivan and Spilka do add significantly to the discussion on qualitative research by considering an ethical dimension. However, although an ethical dimension often indicates an interpretive perspective, their warnings strongly imply a visualist approach rather than a multivocal approach, and they indicate in realist terms that something exists—separate from the ethnographer—to be discovered rather than interpreted: "a danger exists for academics who conduct this type of research but lack enough general experience with technical communication, or particular experience in a workplace culture, to understand what they see" (600).

Overall, in their efforts to distinguish qualitative from quantitative research, Sullivan and Spilka, as do MacNealy and Goubil-Gambrell, reinforce the realist
perspective of objectivity in ethnographic research that idealistically places an emphasis on trying "not to disturb the culture it studies" (596) and, therefore, ignores ethnography's important ethical dimensions. As it is included in these methodological overviews, ethnography is established as an appropriate research method for professional communication; however, these methodological discussions do not touch on issues demanded by interpretive ethnography.

Nevertheless, issues of interpretive ethnography are raised in theoretical essays in composition and professional communication studies. Halpern's article "Getting in Deep: Using Qualitative Research in Business and Technical Communication" is important for understanding interpretive ethnography in professional communication studies because she recognizes distinctions in ethnographic approaches. Although she separates the doing of ethnography from the presentation or writing of ethnography and both from a theoretical perspective, she uses Van Maanen's categories to claim that ethnographers employ "alternative modes of presentation" (37). By defining these three alternatives—traditional realistic narrative, confessional narrative, and impressionistic narrative, she distinguishes significant differences in writing and theorizing about ethnography.

In "Writing Ethnographic Narratives," Brodkey argues that the distinctions between realist ethnography and interpretive ethnography exemplify in practice much of the academy's current theoretical debate, and claims to be "introducing

25 In The Clinical Perspective in Fieldwork, Schein warns researchers that even surveying and interviewing have the potential for harming participants and cultures: "Usually such methods simply assume incorrectly that one can obtain data without influencing and/or disturbing the system. . . .this represents a degree of irresponsibility that needs to be addressed explicitly" (63).

26 Although Brodkey uses the terms "traditional (analytical)" and "experimental (interpretive)," I'll continue to refer to these two perspectives of knowing as realist and interpretive.
ethnography as a field in the midst of an epistemological crisis because the arguments that ethnographers are raising with respect to the source of authority are not different in kind from those being mounted in virtually all quarters of the American academy" (26). However, in general she makes claims about ethnography that describe it inclusively in realistic, visualist terms, stating that "ethnographers study individuals as if their lives were mounted on a cultural proscenium" (25) and that "fieldwork invariably proceeds as if reality were located in the scene of observation" (26). Although she believes all ethnography to be observational and narrative, she builds her argument on differences between the "rhetoric of demonstration and (ethnographic) analysis [which] deals with certainty, that is, offers proofs that presume not simply that certainty is desirable, but attainable" and the "rhetoric of dialectics and (ethnographic) interpretation [which] deals with uncertainty, that is, offers arguments that display rather than obviate doubt" (27). These differences, she explains, are also apparent in attitudes about the role and "interference" of the ethnographer and indicate basic "epistemological issues" (27); their presence is either considered "intrusive" and "problematic" or as necessary for "constructing" information (31). In addition to epistemological, Being There issues, she discusses Being Here issues as she categorizes narrative stances as "perception," "conception," and "interest" (38). She identifies narratives of perception with realist ethnography, describing this ethnographic version as "a guided tour in which reader-tourists more or less willingly accept the narrator or analyst's decisions about what in the data is worth looking at" (39). For a narrative stance of conception, the focus is on the narrator's ideology. And for interest, "readers are in the scene as if they were themselves the narrator" (39). Even more significant for Brodkey—and perhaps
for those in professional communication, than the epistemological differences she sees played out in ethnography, are far-reaching political implications within the academy, especially those of "economic contingencies" and isolationist research:

As long as we persist in finding one another unspeakably rational or empirical, and everyone else unbearably "subjective," we are likely to spend our lives talking to ourselves. Although ethnography resolves none of these problems, it recognizes them as problems. And in so doing, ethnography creates the preconditions for research and social responsibility, if only by arguing that the worlds or words separating "us" from "them" are not natural boundaries, but social borders that we help maintain when we refuse to travel in uncharted territory. (42)

Moving from differences between realist and interpretive ethnography to what she believes are common issues of narrativity, Brodkey dramatizes the rhetorical constraints of telling stories in the academy at the same time that she makes a plea for their importance. Brodkey connects theory, methodology, and presentation in ethnographic research; and enlarges composition scholars' understanding of the issues and diversity within ethnography.

As he theorizes about "Paralogies and the Master Narrative of Objectivity," Kent responds to Brodkey's arguments that differentiate realist and interpretive ethnography. While he agrees with her that "no important difference exists between traditional [analytical] and experimental [interpretive], ethnographies" (73), he explains that even the suggestion of two approaches is problematic. By defining two ethnographic approaches, "Brodkey clearly stresses the unmarked member in the binary opposition 'objectivity/subjectivity'" (74). Kent aims to collapse the objective/subjective split which for ethnography focuses concern on establishing objectivity in research in order to create validity. He rests this possibility on "an alternative vocabulary [which] is beginning to emerge that allows us to talk about discourse production without stumbling over the
contradictions and paradoxes inherent in a language game controlled by the
master narrative of objectivity" (66). For ethnography that alternative
vocabulary means talking about "coherence strategies" rather than objectivity.
These coherence strategies, such as fieldwork methodology, "enable us to weave
the ethnography's claim into our own webs of belief" (69).

Although I can easily agree that all ethnographies are stories, that all
research "accounts" are stories, that, in fact, all understanding is interpretation, I
cannot agree that "no important difference exists" among approaches to
ethnography. I am responding to the slipperiness of the phrase "no important
difference" from my specific ethnographic experiences and local contexts. Realist
ethnographers don't do fieldwork or write ethnographies the same as interpretive
ethnographers; in particular, they think and act differently about access,
"presentation" or writing, and ethical issues. Realist ethnographers might be
concerned about gaining permission to conduct a study or about not influencing
their data source. My concerns are for VisionCorps' employees and owners, and
about telling an honest and interesting story for professional communicators. I
am concerned about being able to develop connections with cultural members who
voice disparate views about forming self-managed teams, and about how best to
represent those views in my writing. But mostly, I am concerned, for example,
because my discussions with a VisionCorps employee to help him analyze his
revisions to the strategic planning document may affect the future direction of the
corporation or because my feedback on an employee's letter to an international
client may not be adequate for preventing potential communication disasters.
The differences are significant between realist and interpretive ethnographers.
And discussion of these differences, and the even more fine-tuned differences
within an interpretive perspective, are important for theory building and for supporting the diversity of professional communication research.

While Kent's focus on "coherence strategies" in communication theory minimizes the political implications of research, Herndl ponders the future of ethnographers and "the reflexivity of postmodern ethnographic theory [which] conflicts with the demand of a professional, institutional practice" (320). Following the ideas of experimental or critical ethnographers, he suggests that "as members of the research community, we need to understand the way our disciplinary discourse appropriates the experience of the research subject and represents it in our institutions" (320). Herndl's ideological view also invokes Geertz's Being There and Being Here situatedness to write about "how the writer establishes a stable relation between herself and the 'other world' she describes, but also how she constructs a relationship between herself as an author and the representation she offers readers" (324). As he writes about the scientific/objective paradigm in relation to ethnographic research, Herndl builds on Foucault's theory of "regimes of truth," which suggests that we need to see how "effects of truth are produced within discourses that are themselves neither true or false, but are 'regimes of truth' produced 'only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint'" (323).

Although Herndl and Kent provide ethnographic researchers with theoretical positions that obviate the need to establish objectivity in a quest for writing Truths, the "multiple forms of constraint" remain a primary concern. Herndl suggests the potential of experimental ethnographies and emphasizes the diversity of ethnographies: "This discourse is not monolithic or unchanging. . .writers who have recognized the textual problems presented by ethnography have offered a variety of suggestions for new, more reflexive texts (327). But he
articulates the downside too: "Since discourse and the knowledge it generates reproduce ideological structures, it will be difficult to impose a radical rhetorical practice in an existing institutional context" (327). Herndl's voice isn't the only to emphasize the pervasiveness of "disciplinary constraints." Significantly, Dobrin and Doheny-Farina, two of the researchers who introduced ethnography to professional communication, have continued to contemplate their early work, explaining their representational decisions as disciplinary-driven.

Dobrin reflects on disciplinary boundaries that are enforced by discipline-specific and generalizable research. With great candor, he destroys the generalities of his early "ethnography," alluding to the real "facts" he learned in his research, those that he believes would be valuable for understanding business and technical writing:

In retrospect, I wish we had been able to write a different report, one more true to the facts. Such a report would have been nothing more than an intelligent, knowledgeable account of the situation there, one that was both true to the complexities and removed from the quotidian. The interest of such a report would not be that it contributed new specialized knowledge to a discipline. The interest would be anecdotal. The writing of such a report, if it were to have general applicability, would be successful only if, like good fiction, it allowed people to recognize themselves in it. (7)

Writing as the guest editor in the inaugural issue of the Journal of Business and Technical Communication, Dobrin's comments broaden responsibility for knowledge-making. In particular, he connects an interdisciplinary audience to support alternatives to the "realistic" research he reported, placing "blame" with boundaries and specialized knowledge. He describes far-reaching implications for

research—for that which I have been calling interpretive ethnography—and its publication and, ultimately, for the academy:

Publishing such reports would not be without risk. Publishing them would be an admission that the academic forms of generalization, those which are designed to create disciplinary knowledge, are not appropriated here. It would be a confession that our knowledge about technical writing or business writing is quintessentially localized. It would be a confession, too, that the kind of knowledge we bring to bear on those specific problems is not susceptible to formulation in general propositions. It would rip off the protective coloration we've been trying to put on for many years. Still, taking the risks might be worth it. It might produce articles that were worth writing and knowledge that was genuinely useful. (7-8)

It is appropriate to conclude this sub-section of ethnographic traces in professional communication by returning to Doheny-Farina and his more recent ideas about ethnography. Previous to the recent article, "Confronting the Methodological and Ethical Problems of Research on Writing in Nonacademic Settings," he argued for ethnographic research in our discipline, offered basic instruction, and, most importantly, provided us with his ethnographic research. Now, almost ten years later, he discusses critical issues and reflects about his ethnographic experiences. While Dobrin and Herndl seem to resent disciplinary restraints, Doheny-Farina characterizes those restraints as audience considerations and asserts, as do many of the interpretive anthropologists I discussed earlier, that all research is rhetorical. Responding to Herndl, Dobrin, and others, he raises issues of "The Role of the Researcher" (Being There) and "The Manipulation and Interpretation of Data" (Being Here). Doheny-Farina does many important things in this article. He connects the whole ethnographic process—Being There and Being Here—especially when he concludes that "if

28Brodkey and Halpern make this same argument for fashioning ethnography, realist or interpretive.
writers of field studies of writing in nonacademic settings make clear to
themselves from the start that their entire research processes—from entering
sites through publishing research reports—are rhetorical enterprises that should
be identified as such, then those researchers can act ethically" (267). Additionally,
he argues that ethics are integral to the ethnographic enterprise; in fact, he
augments "practical validity," validity "determined through a range of readings by
audiences located within the researcher's discipline, as well as those located within
the research sites," to the ethnographer's "ethical stance in the construction of
research texts" (261). He says that this ethical stance depends on the
researcher's role being "consistent with the claims that their studies ultimately
make" (258). And he openly reflects on his aims and methods for "gaining control"
in his fieldwork. As an experienced, savvy ethnographer, he describes his actions
of knowingly "masking" his ethnographic stance: "If in my research report, I
mask my controlling role by presenting my findings from a third-person
impersonal stance (which I have done several times), I am telling what Van
Maanen (1988) calls the 'realist's tale'" (265). This justification for writing realist
ethnography is also made by experienced anthropologists. However, more
important than this justification is his honest reflection on his fieldwork: "I begin
exerting control by trying to obtain things: I want access. I want information. I
want documents . . . . As my place becomes more secure—as I gain control—I
seek conflict. I look for it and probe it . . . . And when I do not find conflict, I subtly
create it. How? Through some of our best methods, such as discourse-based
interviews . . . . and compose-aloud protocols" (264-265).

Although Dohney-Farina contributes significantly to ethnography in
professional communication and although I agree that ethnography is always
rhetorical, as do many others working in interpretive ethnography, his argument is problematic for the following reasons:

- By "masking" their roles in their research, ethnographers mislead readers, especially those who rely on published research to guide their own research attempts. Although many experienced ethnographers understand their relationship with their cultural others and realize that they aren't conducting "objective" fieldwork; they are, however, providing confusing messages to those new to the field or to the research.

- When ethnographers in professional communication continue in a traditional approach of writing realist ethnographies, they seem naive about issues critical to the academy.

- By writing realist ethnography, professional communicators prolong the "myth of objectivity" and the power it exerts over knowledge-making.

How then do (or can) interpretive ethnographers in professional communication research workplace communication, especially when they are aware of the traces and arguments of interpretive ethnography in professional communication research? They can follow Doheny-Farina's admonition to be rhetorical and, therefore, act ethically towards all readers—There and Here. But more importantly and integral to that ethical argument, they can accept rhetorical tensions as inevitable and focus on those tensions and necessary negotiations as important for an ethics of personal belief. Interpretive ethnographers do not have to follow unquestioningly in a realist tradition, acquiescing and reinforcing beliefs they do not hold. A rhetorical approach, in addition to audience considerations, encompasses discussion, negotiation, and even change.
Ethnographic research in the workplace, with its many variations, not just in sites but in approaches— theoretical/methodological—is exactly what the field needs, that and discussion of those research efforts. Only then, as Kent suggests, will we devise new ways of talking about our research; as Doheny-Farina hopes, will we become ethically responsible; or as Dobrin and Herndl speculate, will we negotiate audience and publication expectations and demands. My goal is to further the discussion with my explanation of externalist ethnography and, more importantly, to add my research of VisionCorps.

**Externalist Ethnography**

In the context of an interpretive tradition in anthropology, with its many developing spins, and within a growing tradition in professional communication of workplace studies, I want to explain my ethnographic theorizing/methodology for the study of communication in VisionCorps. I think of ethnography—the intertwined fieldwork and writing—in terms of externalism. I build on language theories of Davidson and Kent in conjunction with the ethnographic theorizing of Rabinow and Goodall for my interpretations of externalism. My interpretations of externalism connect language with knowing, and both with communicative interaction. Externalist ethnographic theory provides theoretical/methodological direction for balancing "participant observation" and "informant dialogue," which trouble, in particular, experimental ethnographers. In addition to helping make

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29 Many professional communication researchers are doing workplace research, developing important knowledge for the field; some of those, in addition to those mentioned in my text, include Cross, Hansen, Couture and Rymer, Locker, and Winsor.

30 Kent contrasts externalism with internalism. He explains that "internalists suppose that all we can ever know are the totalizing models that represent or correspond to reality" (102). The starting point in understanding externalism is that "the externalist takes the position that no split exists between an inner and outer world and claims that our sense of an inner world actually derives from our rapport with other language users, people we interpret during the give and take of communicative interaction" (104).
sense of my ethnographic experiences, externalism, at the same time, guides my
telling of stories. In other words, externalism helps me understand how I
understand, how I make meaning with others continually and interactively—
always, but most significantly, for my ethnographic research, Being There and
Being Here at once.

Davidson's theory of communicative interaction, called radical
interpretation, is the base point for my beliefs about communication and
knowledge-making. Davidson departs from the traditional belief that language is a
predictable system of rules and conventions and uses a number of key terms to
talk about externalism. These terms, which provide meaning about the theory
itself, include the principle of charity, triangulation, the passing theory, and the
prior theory. Davidson's principle of charity is, he admits, a misnomer because it
does not depend on any conscious charitable acts. He means simply that because
people naturally want to communicate, they unconsciously make an effort to
understand others. Triangulation describes the way our thoughts and beliefs
develop through the interaction of individual language users, other language users,
and objects in the world. Although triangulation may seem to suggest that the
concept of a two-way dialogue is replaced by three neatly connecting angles, the
triangle metaphor is an oversimplification and needs to be thought of instead as
messy, multiple, and interrelated. Because, as Davidson explains, no conceptual
schemes exist that guarantee communication success in advance, interactive and
interpretive communication depends on passing theories employed by speakers
and interpreters. All language participants make largely unconscious and
continual adjustments as they communicate and build understanding. At the
same time, prior theories, or the background knowledge possessed by
communicators, facilitate communication by improving the chances of effective passing theories. Prior theories may make communication easier; they cannot, however, guarantee or predict success. Beginning with the principle of charity, Davidson's terminology suggests a way of talking and thinking about communicative interaction.

Although he does not employ the same terminology as Davidson—except for externalism—Rabinow's reflexive theorizing about "the anthropological experience" includes many of the same basic ideas about communication and understanding. Rabinow's beliefs about externalism were first published in 1977 in his *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, a retrospective narrative with a theme of journeying-towards-identity (others and his own). Like Davidson, Rabinow also suggests a contrast to "the scientific perspective on the world" (*Reflections* 38). Although Rabinow's ideas about externalism are not as finely developed or argued as Davidson's, they are vividly told through his theoretical dramatization. Rabinow's readers learn about externalism, not from an analytical argument, but from a narrative. Rabinow seems to expect readers to interpret his meaning of externalism in the relationships he creates. For Rabinow, externalism is about ethnographic meaning-making—about knowing—as a result of interactions between the anthropologist and his/her informants. Externalism is about interactions between individuals; it is about the way ethnographers and cultural members make meaning because of multiple layers of interpretation. Additionally, Rabinow's ideas indicate an externalist position influenced by Foucault's belief that "there is no understanding that is beyond history and
society" (*Foucault* 6). His externalism, therefore, includes the significance of context; the ethnographer and his/her informants exist within a setting(s).

Ten years later, Rabinow and Sullivan continue to develop externalist ideas as they describe changing meanings of culture and of cultural understanding; they emphasize that "when we try to understand the cultural world, we are dealing with interpretations and interpretations of interpretations" and that "cultural meaning as intersubjective and irreducibly fundamental to understanding is the base-point of the whole interpretive project" (7). In other words, for Rabinow, ethnographic meaning depends on layers of interpretation, on intersubjectivity, and on the situatedness that means our understanding is contextualized in the world ("Representations" 6).

Adding to Davidson's and Rabinow's explanation of communication and knowing as continual, contingent interactional adjustments of situated communicators, Kent connects externalism to Sophistic rhetoric and Bakhtin's "open-ended dialogic activities" (36). He describes this position as "paralogic hermeneutics." Kent means that understanding is always interpretive and involves more than logic; it is logic plus the increased understanding of that knowing that logic excludes, and, as such, paralogic has "no normative rules that we may violate" (5).

Kent's explication of externalism gives a positive spin to concerns about communicating across cultural "boundaries." His theories reinforce the potential for communication and understanding—the ethnographer's and cultural others'—albeit not without difficulty or the need for skilled "hermeneutic guessing" (86) of constant alterations and adjustments. He explains that because the "principles of

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31 Much of Rabinow's later work explicates Foucault.
such inventive accommodation are not themselves reducible to theory" as in
codifiable and applicable, pre-existing formulas or models, communication and
knowing involve "nothing less than all our skills at [continual] theory construction"
(39). Kent uses Bakhtin's two main claims as further support for an externalist
position: "(1) language and meaning are thoroughly holistic in nature; an utterance
means something only in relation to a complex network of other utterances, and
(2) utterances exist only within the dialogic and public interactions among
communicants; therefore, no private language can exist" (129).

Most importantly for interpretive ethnographers, Kent's paralogic
hermeneutics dissolves—at least theoretically—the binary of the authorial voice
as belonging to either the ethnographer or the cultural others. In the language of
Bakhtin, Kent argues that "the utterance accounts for the dialogic and
collaborative nature of language-in-use by merging the speaker/text with the
other" (131). Authorial voice is multivocal in the heteroglossic sense that all
communication and knowing depends on interaction, and yet this belief can also
encompass authorial responsibility and opportunity. While Kent's claim that "the
monologic utterance is illusory, for it denies the power of difference and diversity in
social life" (155) is reassuring for ethnographers who retain fears about silencing
voices of cultural others, the ethics of representation are not eradicated.

Interpretive ethnographers research and write in complex rhetorical situations,
with audience and publication constraints which often are contradictory to
externalist theories/methodologies.

Although he doesn't use the externalist label, Goodall writes about his
research in ways that are closest to my beliefs about doing/writing
interpretive/externalist ethnography:
When you embrace, as I do, the social, dialogic nature of communication in which what is being created, constituted, and expressed is neither owned nor shared but *enjoined*, you come away with a certain humility about "authorship" as well as a certain testiness about representing the complexities of others through fairly straightforward, often contextless, knowledge claims. You learn to deal with "voices"; you learn, in fact, to seek them out, to understand them as coproducers of the social text that when pushed a bit are found to be speaking *through us* as well. (Casing 180)

Similar to the way Davidson and Kent write about triangulation, Goodall includes the interaction of the ethnographer, others, and context in communication and knowledge-making. "Ethnography is no longer about 'you' in the quest or conquest of 'them,'" he explains. "It is about the voice that emerges from the context(s) you share, it is about the choices you both make in the relational territory you jointly develop. It is about the plural present" (*Living* 219). Goodall's discussion of the "plural present" summarizes the descriptive tensions within which interpretive/externalist ethnographers work and insists on the same kind of openness (as opposed to closed systems of understanding) that is basic to Bakhtin's dialogism, Davidson's communicative interaction, and Kent's hermeneutic guessing:

Writing ethnography in the spirit of the plural present is a way of recognizing the always contested nature of context, self, and Other. It is a step in the direction of narrative progress, I think, to try to get at the dignity of the Other in the same ways that we try to get at the dignity of self. But the process—both of research and writing—is interdependent and interpenetrating. It is done within the communicative dimensions of experience, which means that all of it can never be depicted and what is selected for depiction has a reason for being there. Interpretive ethnography is about opening up the texts of plural present realities by opening up the ways in which such construction can be experienced and the ways the construction can be carried out, but it makes no promises about gaining neutrality as a result. (*Living* 217)
I describe my ethnographic theory/methodology within a growing tradition of interpretive anthropology, augmented by externalist beliefs about communication and knowing, and requiring a rhetorical balancing act of "the always contested nature of context, self, and Other." Additionally, I am influenced by experimental ethnographers, especially Rabinow by way of Foucault and Foucault in the original, who infuse my brand of externalist ethnography with a constant awareness that communicative interactions are never neutral—they are always enmeshed in relationships of power, sometimes subtle and barely requiring acknowledgment, sometimes pervasive and domineering. In such interactions, power is not evil but inherent; its abuse is never good but abhorrent. Awareness of power brings interpretive ethnographers back to ethics as their central dilemma and to the tensions that infuse postmodern ethical positions that are always social, contextual and negotiable.

Geertz worries about the "moral hypochondria" (Works 137) and "authorial self-doubt" (138) that infuses the theorizing and self-reflection of interpretive ethnographers, and cautions, as does Doheny-Farina ("Confronting" 267), that ethnographers' important work might be derailed. While their concerns are worth noting, I'll conclude this section with my refrain, which asserts that professional communication and workplace communication studies, in particular, need exactly this kind of theorizing. I agree with Rabinow as he borrows from Geertz: "We can, and have been, vexing each other with profit, the touchstone of interpretive advance" ("Representation" 256). These discussions and others open the discipline to new research approaches and to the tolerance that comes with appreciating diverse perspectives. And others such as Marcus and Fischer see current ethnographic unrest only in positive terms: "What is happening'} seems
to us to be a pregnant moment in which every individual project of ethnographic
research and writing is potentially an experiment. Collectively, these are in the
process of reconstructing the edifices of anthropological theory from the bottom
up. . ." (ix).

I am half-way towards introducing my readers to the theories and contexts
that I believe most forecast my ethnography. The theories and contexts of
interpretive ethnographers help explain my approach to this ethnographic
experiment. The other half to which I need to introduce my readers is also about
experimentation and "reconstructing." The theories and contexts of corporate
theorists/consultants influence my research as much as those of interpretive
ethnographers. I study these theorists/consultants to help me understand
VisionCorps and the larger corporate climate within which it functions; they also
are read by VisionCorps' owners and employees and are the prevalent voices
influencing current corporate change. These two contexts are not exclusive;
rather they are part of the same, larger societal changes, and, as such, the same
themes reverberate through each, especially awareness of rhetoric.

**Theories and Contexts of Corporate Theorists/Consultants**

The Modern Corporate hierarchical structure is changing. The changes
have been gaining momentum for the past ten years as corporate decision-
makers—struggling within traditional, modern organizational structures and
struggling within modernist processes for conducting business—have begun
implementing significant and often radical changes. These corporate changes are
fueled by corporate theorists/consultants, who instead of devising better ways of
making the modern structure work—better ways for hierarchical control—have
begun to advocate abandoning the traditional structures altogether. To
understand the current theories and contexts of corporations, and therefore to understand VisionCorps better, I find the ideas of these corporate theorists/consultants valuable. From my studies of these theorists/consultants, I design a discussion of issues or tensions of current corporate change. A summary of the key tensions that I identified in the corporate theorists/consultants' writings is valuable for three reasons. First, I emphasize the density of the interactive discussion since, for example, many VisionCorps employees also read and listen to these same theorists/consultants and many of these theorists/consultants also read and build upon "postmodern" theory. Second, research describing changes attempted in other corporations around the world, although not presented with the same level of detail or analysis as ethnographies, adds to my understanding of VisionCorps' corporate changes and provides a way of talking about these corporate innovations. Third, as suggested by anthropologists such as Agar in *Speaking of Ethnography*, an overview study of relevant literature can provide a kind of interpretive reinforcement. As an interpreter of a distinct corporate culture, I need to ask if anyone else has written about similar occurrences or trends; I need to learn about the broader societal milieu as I make sense of layers of context.

\[32\] In a lecture at the University of Iowa (13 March 1995), anthropologist George Marcus recalled the Princeton setting of 1982-83 and the cauldron-like atmosphere that engendered "postmodernism": he and James Clifford were drafting *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* and David Harvey was working on *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Although I don't deny the significance of these works, especially for postmodern discussions in the academy and in English departments and even within professional communication, Marcus miscasts the casual relationship when he talks about the "appropriations of postmodernism in contemporary corporate structures." The academic discussion undoubtedly fuels, in part, current changes in corporate structure, especially through the theorists/consultants I mention in this Introduction; however, a postmodern perspective and current corporate changes exist within a larger complexity, within a societal milieu.
My reading of corporate theorists/consultants concurrent with my fieldwork helps me develop distinct issues or tensions that blend my descriptions of VisionCorps' communication processes and events and my discussions with VisionCorps' personnel with broader corporate communication research. These tensions help me organize my mass of fieldnotes and experiences—my interpretations; they are not underlying or overarching commonalities but my "read" on both the works of these theorists/consultants and on my fieldwork. This section, then, describes these tensions and argues that research and writings of current theorists/consultants are important for professional communication because these works, like ethnographies of corporate cultures, help us question the assumptions upon which our research and teaching are based, primarily assumptions about The Modern Corporation.

Generally, the tensions I'll discuss don't arise from differences among the theorists/consultants, although each promotes his/her own version of corporate changes. These theorists/consultants have in common the source of their ideas; they write primarily from their first-hand experiences observing changes in corporations around the world; from their on-site interviews with corporate leaders and workers or interviews with seminar participants; from their reactions to each others' writings; and from research in fields such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and literary theory, to name a few. As cross-pollinators of innovative trial-and-error corporate developments, they serve as change agents and visionaries.

Additionally, most theorists/consultants agree on the magnitude of these changes: current corporate changes are not alternatives but the only means of corporate survival. Toffler, therefore, writes of "accelerant change" to
differentiate current changes from those that have always occurred within corporations (xxi, 11, 32). Bergquist argues that current corporate change is as "irreversible" as fire; once a corporation passes a "choice point" there is no return to an earlier condition (7). The corporation is altered permanently. This altered corporation becomes, in the terminology of Davidow and Malone, the "inevitable" virtual corporation which "began as a vision of futurists, became a possibility for business theorists, and is now an economic necessity for corporate executives" (5).

Theorists/consultants argue that today's corporations are embroiled in change. The extent and implications of these changes, and the difficulty of change itself, are the source of tensions. Drucker, writing on the level of societal changes in *Post-Capitalist Society*, claims that we are already in the midst of a transformation period, and, therefore, the modern, hierarchical corporation as we know it has begun to be replaced (3). Hammer and Champy guess that as many as fifty to seventy percent of "reengineering" attempts are unsuccessful (200). And Peters, addressing corporate executives in his "Afterword," explains that "almost all chiefs who read this are staunch supporters of decentralization. Almost all chiefs who read this have decentralized. Almost none of their decentralized companies are decentralized" (759). These estimates underscore the infancy of rhetorical corporations, the difficulty of their creation, and the desperate attempt by corporate leaders to develop alternative ways of doing business.

Explanations by theorists/consultants for the accelerated changes in the modern corporation vary subtly. Drucker attributes these changes to the post World War II GI Bill of Rights, to the computer, and to the Japanese as the first non-Western competitive influence. Hammer and Champy suggest three reasons:
customers are "demand[ing] products and services designed for their unique and particular needs" (18); competition is intensifying because of niche marketing, global competitors, start-up companies, and technology; and, most importantly, "change [itself] has become both pervasive and persistent" in a kind of self-propelling motivation for business decision-making (23). Peters resists spelling out causes, inundating his readers instead with the tempo and complexity of a globalized, "fashionized" market. In addition to their explanations of causes, the theorists/consultants themselves are fanning corporate changes with their publications that line the shelves of airport and mall bookstores, their articles and ideas regularly featured in trade magazines and newspapers, and their seminars and speaking tours.

**Four Key Tensions**

Overlap is extensive among the four key tensions; however, they organize and focus the discussion of communication in rhetorical corporations. Issues of power saturate these tensions of change: from centralization to decentralization, from functional divisions to project teams, from sequential development to simultaneous processes, and from interchangeable workers to knowledge workers. In order to talk about corporate change and to argue that they are actually describing significant changes in the corporations they study, theorists/consultants all provide a backdrop of The Modern Corporation as a benchmark. Since 1895, according to Drucker, the goal of The Modern Corporation has been a stable, unified, controllable structure ("New Organization" 53). Important for our discussion is not whether the goal was actually attained but that it was the organizational objective, the driving force behind management philosophy. It is this stable entity or ideal that theorists/consultants describe and
that I summarize from them as the beginning of their argument that significant
corporate changes are occurring. Decision-makers in what I have termed
rhetorical corporations are abandoning objectives of The Modern Corporation.
Current changes, instead, are multiple and only identifiable by prototypical
features. No one has it "right," and, according to Peters, when management
thinks they have it "restructured," "reengineered," "revitalized," or "transformed,"
they are in trouble; rhetorical corporations have no absolute determining features,
only the challenge to build "disorganizing" into corporate philosophy and
management. Therefore, while The Modern Corporation has been referred to as a
singular entity, rhetorical corporations are plural.

In each of the following subsections, I begin with the origins of these
changes in traditional, modern assumptions, weaving in Yates' argument for the
interdependency of communication with corporate structure, management
philosophy, and technology. Then I juxtapose changes in corporate structure,
management philosophy, and technology that theorists/consultants describe and
make sense of. Tensions result from these changes. Although the
theorists/consultants do not focus on the tensions, they provide understanding of
the corporate changes and support the idea that professional communication is
changing significantly. Their discussion provides context for my ethnography, and
in the story of VisionCorps, I tell about these tensions and what they suggest for
this particular corporation.

**Centralization ➔ Decentralization.** In moves to gain control of products and
markets, The Modern Corporation developed and dispersed in three ways. First,
corporations vertically integrated by expanding into related industries; for
example, automobile manufacturers acquired rubber plantations and factories to
produce tires. They did so believing that ownership of all aspects of production
could result in total product control and, therefore, increased efficiency and profits.
Vertical integration concentrated the capital of the modern corporation—
industrial plants, equipment, and raw materials—under monopolistic control
(Toffler 46). Second, the modern corporation developed and dispersed by buying
out competitive producers, often adding far-flung corporate sites. Third, functions
originally independent of corporations (often research and marketing) were
brought under the corporate umbrella. The sprawl of The Modern Corporation
was fueled by the assumptions that bigger was better and that increased
ownership resulted in more control and increased profits. To control development
and dispersion, The Modern Corporation centralized. The resulting hierarchies
complicated and slowed The Modern Corporation's response to the marketplace.
However, in the modern era of relatively stable mass markets, unwieldy size and
correspondingly slow response time were not critical.

Modern corporate management aimed to centralize and unify control of the
often functionally and geographically dispersed corporation by endowing decision-
making in the top levels of management, the only level that needed or had access
to complete information, and by establishing clear distinctions between divisional
functions so that each division would have limited responsibility and clear
accountability. Corporate boundaries, those delineating the corporation from the
outside and those separating internal divisions, were clear and stable.

The centralized modern corporation was able to develop, in part, because of
technological innovations such as typewriters, carbon paper, and vertical files,
which permitted and, in fact, encouraged the flow and storage of corporate
communication (Yates). These technologies enabled centralized control of The
Modern Corporation, encouraging the flow and storage of communication from dispersed geographical sites toward the central office. In addition, the telegraph became a new means of top-down corporate communication. As Yates reports, although the telegraph was primarily developed by the railroad for safety, manufacturing firms also used it, sometimes installing private lines or developing codes for secrecy as the central office accumulated information and directed the activities of diverse sites.

Centralization of corporate control in top management meant that "genres developed new forms, shaped by the desire for efficiency and standardization" (Yates 100). The clear division between internal and external communication became apparent in the development of the memo as it evolved from the letter format and from in-house notes. The memo heading was helpful for vertical filing systems and for in-house correspondence, and it facilitated the one-topic-per-document guideline that aided filing (Yates 183). Concerns with external communication centered on the ability to make and file copies of letters sent and the task of filing in-coming letters. Eventually, in-house magazines added to the unified culture and, according to Yates, were a humanizing feature to balance the impersonal nature of reports, forms, and memos. Communication functions and forms in the centralized modern corporation solidified the internal, hierarchical flow of information.

Unable to compete successfully because of a cumbersome hierarchical structure, many of today's corporations are decentralizing. Decentralized corporations are more responsive because they are leaner and therefore quicker and more flexible. Additionally, rhetorical corporations blend with customers and suppliers in new, interactive ways. The centralized modern corporation
accumulated layers of hierarchy to attempt efficient control of its corporate sprawl; decentralized corporations flatten those hierarchies.

In decentralizing, corporations emulate smaller, leaner, one-product start-up companies. Start-ups, making the same products as well or better and more responsively, threaten the cumbersome centralized corporation. Therefore, to increase speed and flexibility, corporations focus on "core competencies" (Peters), what they do best, by stripping away vertically integrated divisions and eliminating layers of management. This decentralization is taking many forms, including spin-offs, outsourcing, and customer testing.

Corporations are paring down by spinning-off nonessential divisions. No longer part of a command and control structure, the resulting relationships between "parent" corporations and spin-off corporations require uncharted negotiations. These new relationships often involve financial backing, customer-vendor contracts, shared personnel and equipment, and/or expert guidance. Spin-offs can also speed research and development processes (often referred to as technology transfer). A parent corporation, or sometimes a university research department, or a combination of the two, develops innovative products or processes that are related to its core competencies. Building or "drafting" on the parent corporation, the innovation can be, in a sense, jump-started and quickly released as a spin-off (Peters 513).

Rhetorical corporations are staying lean through outsourcing. Instead of including additional functions under their corporate umbrellas, they hire subcontractors. Service functions are most commonly outsourced, for example janitorial or data entry; however, the variety of outsourced services is increasing. Drucker believes outsourcing is important on a societal level because, in addition
to the expertise of these specialized and independently-owned companies, "it provides opportunities, income, and dignity for service workers" (95). Outsourcing is also a growing trend for the production of much technical writing, especially software documentation and training manuals. Although many corporations have rapidly adopted this production method to cut costs, to adjust for fluctuations in staffing needs, or to evaluate personnel before hiring them, little is known about the ramifications of this dramatic change.

Additionally, corporations engage customers as beta test sites, increasing responsiveness and creating innovative seller/customer relationships (Peters). Rhetorical corporations and customers benefit. Corporations provide the latest product advancement, still in development stage; customers test the product under actual use situations and provide feedback. Customers are drawn into the producer's development cycle, replacing the producer's costly and time-intensive product testing and building customer dependency. In addition to early product access, which results in a time advantage over their competitors, the customer beta-tester benefits from evaluation of and input into the product during its development. Customers then have direct influence on the design and development of the product, to best suit their own particular needs.

Decentralized corporations' innovative supplier/customer relationships blur traditional corporate boundaries. Supply-chain management, for example, shortens production time, improves coordination, and insures supply and final product quality. With suppliers linked directly into corporations' computerized production schedules, corporations eliminate shopping for competitive suppliers, placing purchase orders, and stockpiling parts. "Cuts in inventory," according to Toffler, "translate back into the smaller space and real estate costs... but also
into reduced taxes, insurance, and overhead" (90). Supply-chain management also benefits suppliers; they can plan production schedules more easily and tailor products for their integrated customers.

Instead of a centralized "tidy empire," managers of decentralization negotiate often chaotic corporate extensions (Kanter 87). Managers, therefore, rely more on rhetorical skills as they participate in external diplomacy previously delegated to select top management. Kanter explains this drastic change:

As managers and professionals spend more time working across boundaries with peers and partners over whom they have no direct control, their negotiating skills become essential assets. Alliances and partnerships transform impersonal, arm's-length contracts into relationships involving joint planning and joint decision making. (89)

Moreover, in decentralized corporations, the very nature of capital shifts: owned material assets, such as equipment or buildings, no longer hold high value. In fact, accountants worldwide are trying to develop new methods of gauging corporate assets (Stewart). Therefore, production and marketing relationships and employees who create market power—"intellectual capital"—are the new capital (Drucker; Stewart) and management's new challenge.

Technological innovations enable decentralization through increased speeds and elimination of hierarchical layers. Because computers accumulate and reconfigure data more quickly than can traditional managers, many middle layers are eliminated; data, which used to travel from the bottom to the top of the hierarchy, is now made available to knowledge workers throughout the corporation. Networked computerization also reconfigures traditional corporate boundaries. Internet services, the most extensive computer networking, enhance R & D efforts by stimulating product innovation and development as highly specialized experts make connections with others in their specialized areas.
Sophisticated databases allow methods of merging supplier inventories and
distribution systems (discussed earlier as supply-chain management) and
stimulate new after-sales service techniques (Hammer and Chamy 22, Peters
718). These new marketing techniques, based on increased customer information,
depend on data that is acquired in numerous ways such as check-out scanning
(Toffler 97). Fax use and computer networking provide subcontractors with quick
access to information and, therefore, often permit outsourcing from widespread
geographic locations. Online documentation technologies, including CD-ROM,
bring customers answers more quickly and improve information searches.
Teleconferencing, while not a replacement for face-to-face discussions, often
results in more frequent interaction and includes employees usually restricted by
expensive travel.

Communication in decentralized corporations is challenged by increasingly
diverse and complex audience considerations as corporate boundaries become
more porous. As corporations decentralize, effective rhetorical strategies include,
as Peters cautions, treating "outsiders" as "insiders" (314). Communication
decisions become more complex as basic rules-of-thumb such as distinguishing
between the use of memo and letter format—memos for insiders and letters for
outsiders—are challenged. Paradoxically, communicators may be in closer
contact with audiences than ever before as they work with customers and
suppliers on project teams. Customers may even contribute to corporate
newsletters, provide product documentation, and write performance evaluations of
team members. These changes in communication relationships—away from
command and control directives—emphasize rhetorical skills of audience analysis,
negotiation, and enhanced interaction. Effective communication, Kanter believes,
"rests on more than a simple exchange of information; people must be adept at
anticipating the responses of other groups" (90).

Decentralization of the modern corporate hierarchy, therefore, suggests
complicated communication questions about changes in power, audiences, and
information. In Chapter II, I focus on issues of decentralization for VisionCorps
and discuss questions such as the following in relation to my study:

• As corporate boundaries become less distinguishable and, correspondingly, as
  levels of hierarchies disappear, how are audience considerations changed and
  complicated, especially when concepts such as "customer" and "supplier" are
  being redefined?

• In the modernist corporation, corporate profits depended in part on increased
  control effected by the managed flow of information from disparate corporate
  entities to the centralized seat of authority, where major decisions were made.
  In rhetorical corporations, not only are hierarchical levels being replaced by
  technology, but profits seem less dependent upon control than upon fostering
  rapid innovation. If then information no longer needs to be "gathered" for high-
  level control, how is information flow reconceived and designed? How is
  information "generated"? Who has "access" to information?

• Established by the hierarchy of corporate infrastructure and from clear
demarcations between seller and buyer, the modernist corporation relied upon
clear lines of authority for decision-making. Rhetorical corporations, however,
intentionally blur these distinctions. How then is authority established for
decision-making? How are communication decisions impacted?

**Functional Divisions vs. Project Teams.** Within its expanding corporate
boundaries, The Modern Corporation aimed for increased, centralized control by
creating layers of hierarchy to supply necessary information; functional divisions also added to hierarchical control. Drucker explains the growth of modern corporate hierarchy as a two-stage process: first, ownership became separated from management and, second, hierarchical divisions were established for efficient, scientific management ("New Organization" 53). Within the traditional modern corporation, divisions such as research, production, marketing, finance, and field service primarily functioned independently. The thinking behind this model, the command-and-control model, was that the work of each division could be better perfected if the division were unified because each would operate with unique characteristics and duties. The imagery of the machine—working with the precision of discrete, interlocking parts—dominated this structure. Machines—cold, impersonal, and orderly—inspired the scientific management ideal of controllability and reasoned predictability, the goal of The Modern Corporation.

This corporate model was typified by layers of management in pyramid formation; each successively higher layer encompassed more workers and more "territory." The leaders at the top of each division functioned as the corporate decision-makers, each representing divisional interests. Clear distinctions between divisions and between tasks and titles within divisions facilitated control over specific jobs and accountability for discrete tasks. The typical organizational chart with layers of boxes for position titles and names of employees and clear lines or channels of communication illustrated The Modern Corporation. These layers of management served, according to Kanter, as "watchdogs and interventionists" (89).

The focus of each division was the product (for example, an automobile or a widget); the concern of each division was efficient handling of the product. The
result was a sequential development and production model. Each division, beginning with research where the product was discovered or engineered, sequentially inputted its expertise and then passed the product along to the next division.

The same emerging technologies—typewriters, carbon paper, and vertical files—that centralized modern corporate control also helped create functional divisions. The Modern Corporation both depended on an upward flow of information to inform top management and at the same time was the impetus for the development of memo formats to make a distinction from external letters, reports to provide bottom-line information, and forms and statistical presentation to gather and display information. Downward communication also developed for control: circular letters directed workers' actions, corporate manuals detailed procedures and rules, and job descriptions set out requirements and responsibilities. Yates, focusing on developments from 1850 to 1920, describes the interrelatedness of the modern corporate management structure and philosophy with communication forms and functions:

Impersonal managerial systems—embodied in forms, circular letters, and manuals—replaced the idiosyncratic, word-of-mouth management of the foreman and owners of earlier periods. Information and analyses, increasingly in statistical form, were drawn up the lengthening hierarchies to enable upper management to monitor and evaluate processes and individuals at lower levels. (271)

Communication between divisions, of lesser significance than upward and downward flow, became formalized in written documents that enabled product hand-offs, documented tasks completed, and recorded divisional differences and grievances. Communication in The Modern Corporation of functional divisions
developed clear functions and forms to institute and maintain discrete channels of fragmented information.

Decentralization and project teams blur distinctions that The Modern Corporation carefully chiseled for 1900s hierarchical efficiency. Responding to the current need for quick customer response, decentralization is altering boundaries between the corporation and the outside (suppliers and customers), and project teams are breaking down internal functional divisions (and increasingly boundaries with the outside, as customers and suppliers are included as team members). Project teams comprise employees from traditional divisions who are brought together for projects; each employee contributes expertise and the ability to problem-solve across functional divisions. For example, a project team might include engineers, a marketing director, a finance person, a production specialist, and a technical communication specialist—ideally, the employees most suited for the project.

Project teams, streamlined for quick response, with no rambling hierarchical channels or entangling red tape, offer a new kind of efficiency. In addition to speed, project teams are valued over functional divisions because of increased customer focus and the creative blend of team members. The work of project teams begins with a focus on the customer and includes marketing and servicing strategies at all times; design and development do not focus solely on the product. In fact, "reengineering," the concept of Hammer and Champy, is a process designed to implement customer-focused project teams. It involves asking unassumed questions and "going back to the beginning and inventing a better way of doing work" (31). Additionally, project teams often include
customers and/or suppliers as members, thus bypassing intervening layers of management that typically separate employees from customers.

Project team efficiency also results from the interaction of the diverse talents and experience of team members. In emphasizing that these teams are "projectized," Peters distinguishes between committees, whose members have a major responsibility to represent their constituencies, and project teams, whose primary task is to achieve a specific goal: "Committees deliberate. Project teams do" (208). Project teams bring people together to solve particular problems or to reengineer business processes. Then these project teams dissolve, perhaps to work together again or to work in different configurations.

The functional divisions of the modern corporation encouraged separation and isolation; project teams encourage interdependency in which, as Toffler explains, "the parts of the process are not the whole, and they cannot be isolated from one another" (81):

Information gained by the sales and marketing people feeds the engineers, whose innovations need to be understood by the financial people, whose ability to raise capital depends on how well satisfied the customers are, which depends on how well scheduled the company's trucks are, which depends in part on employee motivation, which depends on a paycheck plus a sense of achievement, which depends. . .et cetera, et cetera. (82)

Management philosophies for project teams differ dramatically from command-and-control directives. Kanter explains that "executives must be able to juggle a set of constituencies rather than control a set of subordinates. They have to bargain, negotiate, and sell instead of making unilateral decisions and issuing commands" (90). Managers "think cross-functionally" (Kanter 89), to coordinate diverse expertise and to reward team accomplishments. In fact, the
employees of rhetorical corporations become internal clients; employees, therefore, need to be persuaded, and they need the ability to persuade others.

Much current technology not only enables project teams but is designed to do so. Networks of personal computers (the new corporate infrastructure) allow employees access to increased amounts and variety of information through e-mail, internal on-line databases, and external bulletin boards. These technologies support a great deal of work, especially invention and development processes (Peters 110, 122). "Groupware," software designed to facilitate simultaneous work by individuals on group projects, encourages integrated product design by both in-house project teams and teams formed by workers in remote locations. Computer-aided design (CAD) helps project teams analyze products during development, before actual prototypes are created, thus team members' diverse expertise impacts design. Computer-aided manufacturing (CAM) and computer-integrated manufacturing (CIM) help teams facilitate customization of products and reduce development and production cycles in response to niche marketing (Peters 115; Hammer and Champy 45). These technologies allow production to be quickly retooled in response to more specialized markets and product variety.

To efficiently enhance project teams, new computer technologies are not just added to the modern corporate structure. "Automating and computerizing existing organizations," Savage warns, "with all their distrust, petty politics, and disjointedness, only makes the mess faster, not better" (73). Integrated computerization is dependent on the integration of human factors, human networks. And creative team members use that technology in ways never considered before in the modern hierarchical corporation.
Project teams create, strategize, and problem solve by developing new communication processes. Project teams create new forms of communication for new purposes that often add to the breakdown of functional divisions. Workers who have never before been involved in important written and oral persuasion develop and present proposals of team recommendations. Changes in communication formats are summarized by Peters: "Constant e-mail chatter and face-to-face meetings almost completely superseded the ubiquitous memos, lengthy reports, and ponderous get-togethers that marked the languorous firms" (42). Documents written as part of team projects, often on-line, evolve as guides, including product timelines and feature identification, and become means of evaluation. Communicators are changing, audiences and purposes are changing, and formats are changing.

Changes in communication resulting from the formation of project teams stimulate many new questions. In Chapter III, I write about VisionCorps' efforts toward projectizing to provide further discussion of questions such as the following:

- As modernist corporate structure and management theories change from establishing clear-cut, distinct functional divisions to promoting cross-functional, project teams, how is communication affected? How are project teams best formed and constituted? How do the disparate team members communicate for decision-making and actions?

- In rhetorical corporations the primary function of corporate communication is no longer to pass information upward or to disseminate directives downward but to provide information throughout the corporation to all members of self-managed teams. How does communication facilitate the self-management of these teams? In what formats?
Sequential Development ≠ Simultaneous Processes. Because of the corporate control and stability that accompanied production and selling of products to mass markets and because of discrete corporate divisions, the hierarchically layered modern corporation functioned with slow-moving sequential development and less intense time demands. Now, however, mass marketing is increasingly customized. This increased market pressure for individualized or "fashionized" (to use Peters' term) products, coupled with new global competition, creates new time constraints. The stability and predictability of The Modern Corporation, other than the steady growth of centralization, depended on relatively fixed products, as determined by corporate discoveries and innovation, and identifiable and known markets. In this stable environment The Modern Corporation could be structured for the mass production and distribution of millions of identical products; product development cycles were charted and planned in orderly sequences. The attention of owners and employees, therefore, could be focused on the product, with correspondingly long development cycles, and not on the customer's fashionized demands.

Responding to fashionized markets and therefore increased time demands, project teams facilitate simultaneous development and production. Unlike The Modern Corporation's separation of functions which resulted in sequential product hand-offs from one division to another, concurrent production shortens product cycles, because team members simultaneously and holistically consider the product, customer, and business processes. In addition, theorists/consultants argue, problems and innovations are handled with more immediacy and foresight. For example, marketing can head off the development of low-demand products,
and engineering can anticipate issues of service and maintenance during the product design phase.

Management in The Modern Corporation centered on a finite system of stable, knowable tasks that could be easily distinguished, delegated, and evaluated. Therefore, managers were able to motivate employees with the potential of steady advancement up the corporate hierarchy or with the threat of demotion or being passed over. Managers also gathered data so that corporate leaders could accumulate information over time for charting predictions.

In what Toffler describes as the "smokestack economy," smokestack technologies operated huge factories, massive machinery and, more recently, mainframe computers. Huge, stable technologies, requiring lengthy start-up or retooling time for production equipment, matched lengthy development and production cycles. Even technologies like the typewriter, with its pool of secretaries, and vertical files were relatively fixed in one location and hence stable.

Communication followed the directive to "get it in writing," thereby making the words lasting and eliminating possible confusion. An example of communication for stability was corporate policy manuals. Although, as Yates explains, these manuals often took the form of looseleaf binders so that they could be added to or changed, their purpose was to ensure corporate stability by issuing directives for employees. Manuals also detailed policies and lines of authority as they "attempted to transcend the individual and create an organizational memory" (Yates 71). Policy manuals, verified with legal caution, left few questions about appropriate action as set out by the corporate leaders.

Today, effective product development, production, and selling means quick market response. The ability to respond to niche markets with specialized
products depends on shortened development, production, and delivery cycles. And in order to react quickly, the modern hierarchical corporation is paring down layers of management, devising strategies for fast product development and production, and stimulating worker interaction to speed the process. According to Davidow and Malone in *The Virtual Corporation*, the result is "a new business model" characterized by a "speeded-up sense of time" (5). Or as Peters calls it, "the hustle."

When time is intensified, management must "beat" the increased competition (often newer and leaner, as the subsection on decentralization described) to the marketplace with product innovations. This intensity also means being rhetorically motivated to consider the customer, reacting or even "proacting" with satisfying alacrity. Management is challenged, as Toffler suggests, to "shorten time—for instance, by communicating swiftly or by bringing new products to market fast" (88). Shortening time also takes the form of front-ending decision making. For example, "a well-trained employee," as Davidow and Malone explain, "dealing directly with the situation can now make the decision faster and in a more responsive fashion than the remote manager miles away" (10), who may be slowed by sequential channels of authority. More aggressively, Peters believes quick-time management depends on "unleashing" talents of co-workers and rapid, trial and error learning: "Our job today is to create organizations not where people 'do it right the first time' (what an absurd idea), but where people get on with it—'crudely'" (578). This radically different management philosophy is the basis for Peter's excitement about "liberation management."

Employees are encouraged with freedom to try, to fail, and to try again—quickly, in rapid-fire, trial-and-error response. Thus, projectizing and knowledge workers
come together in the concept of simultaneous processes as employees are juxtaposed in new configurations to stimulate innovation and responsiveness.

Improving customer response relies on instant communication. From extensive databases for analyzing customer preferences to electronically directed delivery systems, new computers and communication network technology provide the means for ever faster response time. In itself, the "white hot rate" (Toffler 112) of continuous technological innovation fuels the time dependencies of rhetorical corporations. These innovations make possible the development of new products in record time and the variation and customization of existing ones. In addition, Toffler explains, new technologies "drive transaction speeds toward instantaneity" (54). Increased transaction times impact broadly: "As capital markets expand and interlink, from Hong Kong and Tokyo to Toronto and Paris, crossing time zones, money runs faster. Velocity and volatility both rise, and financial power in society shifts from hand to hand at faster and faster speeds" (55).

Technological innovations also speed individuals' time. Cellular phones, fax machines, e-mail, and laptop computers change the dimensions of time, communication, and business. For example, at the end of an eight-hour-day, a businessperson boards a plane with laptop, checks the company e-mail and sends messages in response, discusses important developments using the in-flight phone, and continues throughout the trip preparing a proposal for the coming day. Extending the business day beyond eight hours has always been a possibility and catching some sleep instead of delving into on-flight work is still an alternative; however, new technologies expand the sites of conducting business, provide time-
altering tools, and increase the number of tasks that can be accomplished simultaneously.

As corporations react to intensified time demands, communicators respond to new constraints for document production and reception. "Budgets, training procedures, strategic plans, quarterly reports, and other documents will increasingly be produced collaboratively in real time," according to Peters, "not processed in long cycles of draft and revision" (436). Not only do employees lack time for producing documents, they do not have time for reading them. This lack of reading time is evidenced, for example, with the use of corporate policy manuals. Policy manuals, artifacts of The Modern Corporation designed to cover all contingencies with top-level decisions and to establish a corporate memory to guide employees' actions, have evolved to unwieldy dimensions, requiring too much employee time. While policy manuals continue to serve as reference guides and as legal safeguards, no one has expectations of employees reading or remembering the information. Instead, corporate knowledge is embedded in the real-time behaviors and processes of the employees, and one-page vision statements, often drafted by teams, provide brief, general guides and motivation (Toffler 182).

Accelerated temporality raises important questions about changes in corporate communication. In Chapter IV, I address questions such as the following based on my research of VisionCorps:

- When corporate time is sped-up, and in response the order of work is changed from sequential to simultaneous, how are development processes altered?
- When time and the ordering of work are no longer perceived as progressive, determinate accomplishments, what happens to corporate communication?
• How are traditional professional communication formats changed in response to new time demands?
• When employees are pressured by increased time demands and they reconfigure concepts of work order, how is corporate efficiency affected?

Interchangeable Workers ≠ Knowledge Workers. In The Modern Corporation of centralization and functional divisions, the separation of thinking and doing became the norm. Workers accomplished hands-on jobs; middle managers gathered, analyzed, and passed information up the hierarchy; and corporate leaders accumulated information to make important decisions. Information, therefore, was perceived as objective, existing independently of individuals or groups, often hoarded as a kind of "corporate currency." When information was thought to exist "out there" only to be discovered or accumulated, the creativity and interaction of workers was valued less. Workers were more like the interchangeable parts in a machine-like factory whose actions needed to be directed and controlled by thinking management and who could be easily replaced by others to perform the same systematized tasks. Workers only needed to follow directions.

With thinking and doing separated, duties and responsibilities could be clearly defined. The hierarchy was reinforced because each position built on the knowledge of the position below. Drucker explains upward promotions into command or management positions: "The old-type organization assumed that the superior knew what the subordinate was doing—for the superior, only a few years earlier, had occupied the subordinate's position" (107). Superiors could easily manage by control since they were authorized by their hierarchical experience and
because clear job descriptions and responsibilities could be established and used to slot workers into appropriate positions.

A dramatic example of the separation of doing and thinking in the modern corporation accompanied the advent of the typewriter. As this technological innovation gained popularity, management realized that the person doing the physical actions did not have to be the same person "writing." A whole new class of clerical positions arose comprised of typists and stenographers (primarily women) who were employed, not to think, but to transmit managers' oral communication into written form (Yates 45).

The Modern Corporation was marked by splintered information throughout the hierarchical ranks; information only needed to come together at the top where thinking was necessary for decision making. Therefore, written communication for all but the top decision makers evolved into formats for reports and forms for gathering and passing facts upward. Lower and middle management "objectively" collected, ordered, synthesized, analyzed, and formatted the facts, as if any employee would write the identical, objective report based on the same information. Problem-solving, persuasion, and collaborative interaction were usually not the aims of communication.

If The Modern Corporation separated thinking and doing with only a few top managers making decisions and the majority of workers following directions, then The Modern Corporation could rely on the efficiency of standardized, interchangeable workers; rhetorical corporations aim for a radically different kind of efficiency. This new efficiency is based on the belief that people "who actually do a job know more about it than anybody else" (Drucker 91) and that to survive in the current quick-paced, rapidly changing marketplace corporations need to
"grow" all the creative knowledge they can (Harari 60). Decentralization, project teams, and simultaneous processes depend on knowledge workers. With layers of middle management eliminated, the gap between thinking and doing is reduced, and workers have increased "thinking" and interacting opportunities and responsibilities; in fact, they are often in situations where their knowledge and "hands-on" experience are required. Knowledge workers also supply needed innovation in today's corporations. The need for innovative/creative/knowledge workers, according to Toffler, results from the fast-paced economy and the "blistering hot" competition (152) which create "one-of-a-kind" business situations and "perishable" knowledge (168).

This need for knowledge workers is more complex: rhetorical corporations operate on a changed perspective of knowledge. Drucker speculates that this shift has been building over the last forty years as "the industries that have moved into the center of the economy. . .have as their business the production and distribution of knowledge and information, rather than the production and distribution of things" (182). Effective rhetorical corporations, however, do not "manufacture" and "distribute" knowledge in the same way The Modern Corporation produced goods. Corporations of knowledge workers, according to Drucker, are based on more than a shift to the intangible, more than a shift from concrete products to intellectual capital:

In the knowledge society. . .individuals are central. Knowledge is not impersonal, like money. Knowledge does not reside in a book, a databank, a software program; they contain only information. Knowledge is always embodied in a person; carried by a person; created, augmented, or improved by a person; applied by a person;

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33 Similar to the decreasing numbers of people involved in active farming to produce necessary amounts of food, today, in large part because of technology, the manufacture of "hard" goods requires fewer people.
taught and passed on by a person; used or misused by a person.
The shift to the knowledge society therefore puts the person in the
center. (210)

When knowledge is perceived as the interaction of ideas, as a creative process
that is always connected to people, as made (or grown) and not gathered, workers
become more valuable; they are not just interchangeable parts of a system.

Toffler and Drucker agree that the shift toward knowledge workers and
knowledge (or rhetorical) corporations depends on a reconceptualization of
capital—or economic base (Drucker)—or source of power (Toffler). Both believe
that just as the economic and power base of land shifted to raw materials,
factories, and machines in the era of The Modern Corporation, a shift is now
occurring that privileges knowledge. Toffler forecasts the magnitude of this shift
toward knowledge as capital:

> The shift to this new form of capital explodes the assumptions that underpin both Marxist ideology and classical economics, premised alike on the finite character of traditional capital. For unlike land or machines, which can be used by only one person or firm at a time, the same knowledge can be applied by many different users at the same time—and if used cleverly by them, it can generate even more knowledge. It is inherently inexhaustible and nonexclusive. (61)

On a practical level for corporations, this shift—away from the sequential and
finite and to the simultaneous and inexhaustible—means that "the smartest
firms...operate on the assumption that productivity and profits will both
skyrocket if mindless work is reduced to a minimum or transferred to advanced
technology, and the full potential of the worker is tapped. The goal is a better-paid
but smaller, smarter work force" (Toffler 78).

Management in knowledge corporations involves skills of negotiation,
delegation, motivation, and more. "Mastering the management of knowledge,"

which Peters admits is the foremost challenge, involves "inducing" workers to "learn from one another—quickly, efficiently, effectively" (30). Managing knowledge, creativity, or imagination is in fact, according to Peters, impossible: "Instead, you 'unleash,' 'create the context for the expression of,' whatever" (600). In other words, instead of managing for uniformity, managing in rhetorical corporations means acknowledging and fostering diversity. For Peters and others "cross-fertilization," which values diverse perspectives, "is the key to creativity" (171). For Toffler "corporate glasnost" is the appropriate climate for spawning creativity: "an openness to imagination, a tolerance for deviance, for individuality, and the serendipity that has historically accounted for many creative discoveries" (152).

Theorists/consultants warn, however, that managing knowledge workers is not easy. As they did in the interchangeable modern corporation, managers cannot expect to know all that their "subordinates" know by virtue of having formerly held the position. Managers (if their positions are not eliminated) work to flatten the hierarchies that create disempowered, tradition-enforcing subordinates. Equally difficult, if managers are doing their new job of "growing" knowledge amidst their co-workers, they cannot expect to learn everything their knowledge workers create. Instead of managing under stable knowledge conditions, managers must maximize the "inexhaustible and nonexclusive" aspects of knowledge. Additionally, managers must contend, not only with their own altered status and power, but, also, as Kanter explains, with management tools which no longer include traditional incentives such as raises and promotions:

As if the loss of carrots and sticks was not enough, many managers can no longer even give their people clear job standards and easily mastered procedural rules. Postentrepreneurial corporations seek problem-solving, initiative-taking employees who will go the
unexpected extra mile for the customer. To complicate the situation further still, the complexities of work in the new organization—projects and relationships clamoring for attention in every direction—exacerbate the feeling of overload. (91)

In rhetorical corporations, managers offer incentives based on worker satisfaction. These satisfactions come from continuous learning and project commitment as a result of working with the same project from inception to completion (Drucker 93; Kanter 92; Peters 182).

Technologies of the modern corporation, which enabled interchangeable workers, splintered information; workers had access only to fragments of information. Knowledge workers require technologies designed for information sharing. The same technological innovations that enhance decentralization, project teams, and simultaneous processes provide improved employee access to information. Shared information is essential for knowledge workers, both to produce in response to their increased responsibilities and to stimulate creativity and problem solving. This substantial risk for corporations accustomed to command and control management results, as Toffler describes, in significant changes: "inside major corporations, employees are winning access to knowledge monopolized by management. And as knowledge is redistributed, so, too, is the power based on it" (8).

In The Modern Corporation, the technological innovation of typewriters and the corresponding increase in numbers of secretaries exemplified the separation in thinking and doing of interchangeable workers. Today, the widespread use of personal computers by everyone in the corporation, including top executives, demonstrates the merging of thinking and doing in rhetorical corporations. In The Modern Corporation, status depended, in part, on access to a secretarial pool and the span of control that resulted in the production of more reports. In rhetorical
corporations, status is more balanced as all employees gain access to e-mail, computer bulletin boards, fax machines, etc.—all technologies for sharing and multiplying information.

Knowledge workers, valued for their unique experience and expertise, have new opportunities and requirements for rhetorical decision making. Knowledge workers are part of decision-making processes that generate new communication formats for new purposes; in rhetorical corporations, knowledge workers do more than gather data into reports to be fed into the upward hierarchical flow. Knowledge workers, for example, are both the creators and audiences for "reengineering" documents such as "cases for action" and "vision statements." These documents are written by "reengineering teams" to propose the need for reengineering and to guide companies in the reengineering process (Hammer and Champy 149). Other examples of knowledge workers' new communications include McKinsey and Company's Rapid Response Network and On-Call Consultant. In the Rapid Response Network, organizational librarians respond to consultants' requests with documents such as "internal Practice presentations... relevant letters of proposal, sanitized documents from client work... book reviews, and journal articles," and they refer inquiries to On-Call Consultants, members of the firm, who have agreed to "chat with consultants throughout the firm... [and] to get back to any caller within 24 hours" (393). Both forms of communication maximize employee problem solving, interaction, and learning.

Many questions, such as those following, are suggested by knowledge workers' new opportunities and responsibilities for rhetorical decision making and actions. In Chapter V, I discuss these questions based on my analysis of the challenges of knowledge workers in VisionCorps:
• What are the communication relationships between corporate owners/managers and knowledge workers?
• What part do knowledge workers play in rhetorical corporations?
• How does the concept of knowledge workers relate to other tensions of changing rhetorical corporations?

My four subsections—from centralization to decentralization, from functional divisions to project teams, from sequential development to simultaneous processes, and from interchangeable workers to knowledge workers—describe the theories and contexts developed by theorists/consultants to both explain the changes they believe are occurring in some corporations and, at the same time, to actually generate these changes. Before turning to my research in which I analyze one corporation, whose owners and employees are embroiled in these four tensions, I trace the impact of change in current corporations on professional communication studies, to show both connections to my research and to establish its need.

Traces of Corporate Change in Professional Communication Studies

From my review and analysis of the publications in professional communication that reference changes in corporate communication, I realize that my task is less to argue for a space for my study within our research than to argue that the many traces indicate the pervasive influence and prevalence of these changes; the connections exist in important publications. Therefore, more research, such as my ethnographic study of VisionCorps, is needed for in-depth analysis and to add to a broader discussion of these changes. I describe the breadth and significance of these discussions, and, in particular, emphasize the need others believe exists for more research. Articles focusing on technologies of
change include those by Hansen ("Communication") summarizing and raising research questions about modes of communications technologies; by Norman and Grider explaining Structures Document Processors (SDPs); by Easton, Eickelmann, and Flatley discussing electronic meeting systems (EMS) technology's affect on groupwork; and by Ostroff, Donnelly, and Fried writing about Florida Power and Light's efforts to increase intra-corporate communication with employees by implementing emerging technologies. Other significant articles focus on organizational processes or structure: Dulye writes about changes in management "fabric"; Capps describes a move toward self-directed teams as the result of "a work redesign effort"; McDaniel, Young, and Vesterager detail the role of technical writers on a computer integrated manufacturing (CIM) project team; Hansen ("Writing") analyzes a multi-departmental project team's efforts to create authority through writing; Mirel, Feinberg, and Allmendinger advocate "highly iterative swap-meet interactions" over "assembly-line collaborations" between writers and graphic designers for creating improved documentation; and Redish hints at the expanding roles of technical communicators in response to current business and industry changes.

More significantly, Gatien, in summarizing articles by management theorists, including work by Drucker and Kanter, speculates on what the changes in organizational structure might mean for technical writers and communication managers. His article in *Technical Communication* combines this literature review with his fifteen years of experience as a technical communication writer/editor, supervisor, and manager. Gatien emphasizes the discrepancies between management theory, which promotes "a new paradigm for restructuring their corporations" (415), and the practice of many corporations that equate
change with "downsizing." However, he believes "business is going through a period of fundamental organizational change" that will have far-reaching implications for "how work is done, and what's important" (417). Because of his concern for technical communicators in this "new corporate paradigm," Gatien speculates that "perhaps most important, they will need to change the way they see themselves. They will need to become team members, leaders, negotiators, innovators, even entrepreneurs" (419).

In an article for the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, Sopensky and Modrey, experienced workplace professional communicators, emphasize the importance of creative problem solving and the understanding of organizational cultures for the survival of professional communicators in times of corporate change. Although not discussed in depth, corporate change is the understood motivation for the how-to, anecdotal advice they offer professional communicators. Sopensky and Modrey also believe that professional communicators need to work differently because of corporate changes and suggest that "ultimately, the solutions to the problems illustrated in these scenarios are not to work harder, but to be creative and to work differently. Problem-solving skills evolve more from using common sense and learning from past experience than from following a cookbook" (104). Although they teach "survival skills" in their article, Sopensky and Modrey caution that "what may have been true today will inevitably change tomorrow" (111).

In addition to these articles providing practical suggestions for professional communicators working within corporate change/restructuring, Freed connects postmodern theory with organizational changes. He writes about corporate changes that collapse hierarchies of Fordism into flattened organizational
structures. He speculates about "the new organization, a mosaic of structures, voices and texts, [which] constantly changes not only internally but in its relationship to the decentered space of flows that characterizes the larger system of organized knowledge" (211). In his effort to describe "postmodern practice" for Blyler and Thralls' *Professional Communication: The Social Perspective*, he combines postmodern theorizing about "indeterminacy, fragmentation, representation, the focus on the local" with "recent changes in the organization and process of production, both globally and locally" (204). As he makes these connections, his writing builds primarily from ideas of Lyotard and Toffler and from his international corporate consulting experiences.

Rogers and Allbritton, in reviewing literature on interactive communication technologies (computer-mediated communication), implicate these technological innovations with business communication studies and, in particular, with corporate changes. In addition to this literature, Rogers writes from his research on the PEN (Public Electronic Network) Homeless Conference for which he accumulated and studied all participants' e-mail for one year, that of both the "homeless and homed." Most significantly, the authors pose far-reaching questions such as the following: "Will organizational hierarchy fade in its influence on human behavior in the face of the decentralizing interactive technologies? What happens to such fundamental organizational principles as chain-of-command and span-of-control in an organization when everyone can talk to everyone?" (193). Challenging business communication scholars, Rogers and Allbritton insist that these questions are the "priority task" and conclude that "coping with these issues and their impacts on business will be a priority for practitioners of business communication" (193).
Tebeaux, in summarizing writings about the impact of communication technology, speculates about the need for changes in technical communication curricula to prepare students for the workplace of the "Information Age." Tebeaux's "The High-Tech Workplace: Implications for Technical Communication Instruction" is the capstone article in *Technical Writing: Theory and Practice*, which includes other important articles "by leaders in the field" whose "essays mirror the status of the teaching of technical writing as the twentieth century draws to a close" (Fearing and Sparrow vi). Along with the other writers I've discussed in this section, she believes the nature of work and the work environment are changing and that these changes "will alter what we should teach" (136). In fact, her research leads her to articulate eight implications for teaching technical writing, implications which my ethnography supports.

Tebeaux's implications for teaching result, in part, from her claim that "communication technology is also reshaping organizational hierarchies and the way decisions are made and communicated in organizations. Because rapid changes in technology require rapid decisions, rigid multi-level hierarchies in organizations are being replaced with less complex decision-making structures requiring fewer levels" (139). Communication in these environments, she explains, will not rely on "generic reports and letters" or "communication models" (141); therefore, she calls for a new, more inclusive rhetoric "that deals with all kinds of discourse, visual messages, electronic communications, mass media, and the nature of knowledge (how we know what we know)" (141). Tebeaux also convincingly emphasizes the need for research: "Never in the history of technical communication has practical, empirical research been so crucial to effective instruction" (141).
These articles reinforce that issues of corporate change are significant for professional communication. Many of the articles, in fact, emphasize the need for research that questions modernist assumptions about corporate structure and management philosophies, and that focuses on corresponding implications of technological innovations. In particular, the articles advocate research conducted within and focused on corporations transitioning from the modern corporate structure. For professional communication to keep current with, and even influence, corporate communication changes, we need the wide scope of qualitative research that considers layers of social influences involved in professional communication and that at the same time offers the specificity of in-depth studies of local professional communication cultures. Research such as this is valued because "to the extent that ethnography can complicate the simplified and often incorrect notions that one group has of another, it can play an important role in present and future worlds" (Agar 204).

The Story of a Rhetorical Corporation

Both the background summaries of the key tensions I identified from reading corporate theorists/consultants and the growing literature about corporate changes in professional communication support the argument that current changes in The Modern Corporation—in structure, in management philosophy, and in technologies—are significantly and interdependently impacting communication. However, with a focus on structure, philosophy, and technologies, the theorists/consultants I am interpreting generally seem to ignore the human element in these sweeping changes. And changes are often not easy for the

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34 Rabinow and Sullivan believe that interpretive ethnographies provide a means to consider the human issues as an important alternative when "politicians and academic experts find it easier to talk about the standard of living than about what a society might be living for. In social
people involved. These theorists/consultants have not extensively researched the human factors related to these changes—issues involving values and quality of life. They are not, however, unaware of human issues. Peters, for example, intersperses his success stories with sections highlighting inherent paradoxes. Toffler also focuses awareness on human impact: "So deep a restructuring doesn't happen without anguish and confrontation. . . .millions find their incomes threatened, their ways of work made obsolete, their futures uncertain, their power slashed" (27). In their conclusion, Davidow and Malone posit "a final question," "Is the virtual corporation virtuous?" (266) Furthermore, although those contributing to professional communication research are beginning to study the affects of corporate changes on professional communication, no studies to date have focused on these tensions of change. These professional communicators instead describe corporate changes and suggest survival strategies or call for additional research. Many believe these times of change to be exceptionally challenging for technical communication teachers and communication specialists.

However, in the next four chapters, I will focus on the tensions—the difficulties and the gains—and suggest that trade-offs exist that may make these corporate changes worthwhile. The most important trade-off is emphasized in the term "rhetorical corporations." Many theorists/consultants believe a compelling benefit exists for employees of corporations attempting innovative changes: today's corporate leaders and managers cannot manage workers through control; they must influence employees (colleagues) by negotiation. Some analysts caution that this move toward rhetorical corporations may be a smokescreen that

technology as in scientism, analytic reason has cut itself off from the human whole that could give some intrinsic sense to its formal operations" (16).
obscures a different, more subtle kind of worker control or exploitation (Alvesson, Burrell, Thompson). However, if managers are suddenly more aware and concerned with being rhetorical, power relationships are shifting. Drucker and Toffler argue that this shift derives from corporations' need for a creative, and, therefore, diversified work force. Power shifts because corporations value and need the individual employee's creativity, experience, problem solving abilities, etc. more than s/he needs the corporation. This powershift and the corresponding necessity for rhetorical corporations is increasingly apparent. Therefore, in addition to being "knowledge organizations," "postmodern corporations," and "networked organizations" (both in the electronic sense and the human), corporations are also becoming rhetorical corporations.

The following chapters of *Communication in a Rhetorical Corporation* are about real people (although all names have been changed) and their communication with others. Told within this larger context, these people's stories continue to develop in detail the tensions—the ethnographic tensions of access, textualization, ethics of interpretation, and cultural others; and the corporate tensions of centralization ➔ decentralization, functional divisions ➔ project teams, sequential development ➔ simultaneous processes, and interchangeable workers ➔ knowledge workers—that I have outlined in this introduction. Chapter 2 evolves from contrast and confrontation: a meeting between representatives of the parent corporation and the spin-off's personnel. The chapter provides detailed examples of decentralization (as a spin-off, as a purchaser of outsourced services, and as the negotiator of customer beta test sites) with the resulting messy

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35These writers are representative of those in management studies who are interested in critical theory, especially with employee status and consumerism. Alvesson also writes about rhetoric and organizations; however, he only connects rhetoric to "knowledge-intensive organizations" such as consulting firms.
boundaries and relationships. And the chapter describes communication among numerous decentralized participants. Chapter 3, beginning with project reviews and presentations, is about *project teams* and more teams, the constant reconfiguration and what it means for employees to work with the shuffle. This chapter also includes issues of information and database sharing, and individual and team accountability. Chapter 4 is about time—actually, no time and development cycles, both sequential and *simultaneous processes*. The chapter follows the development of a process document that is used to drive the entire product development process. The chapter also discusses the impact of intensified time demands on documentation specialists, especially as they function with marketing representatives and software developers. Chapter 5 ties the other tensions together in the concept of *knowledge workers*. Altered corporate power relationships between owners and knowledge workers is the focus of the chapter. In particular, the chapter elaborates on the challenges and conflicts in this team-based organization of knowledge workers.

While this introduction provides context—both the context in which I am writing this ethnography and the context in which VisionCorps is developing, the next four chapters add details of this specific, local culture of professional communication. Through details concerning VisionCorps' owners and employees and their audiences and communication purposes, processes, formats, and technologies, I argue my claims:

- As its owners and employees are continually reconceiving and altering corporate structure and management philosophy, VisionCorps' communication is also changing significantly
Rather than trying to achieve command and control objectives, VisionCorps is focusing on customers in new and inclusive ways, and on conducting business with an awareness of and reliance on negotiation and interaction.

Because I am writing an ethnography of a specific, local culture—about people, events, and setting—my dissertation is a blend of narrative and analysis throughout. I repeatedly argue my claims in a variety of reinforcing narrative/analytical styles and voices:

- "thick description" as a storytelling technique to heighten readers' interest and to engage them in active meaning-making with me, the participants, and events of VisionCorps.

- Details and explanations of people, events, processes, and formats as interpreted by VisionCorps' participants and me to support readers' understanding of this rhetorical corporation.

- Speculation to help readers analyze the significance of communication changes as told in each chapter and join in my musings about applications of "postmodern" issues impacting professional communication.

- Explanation of my research methodology and discussion of ethnographic issues, especially as they are currently developing in professional communication, as a means to help readers evaluate my ethnographic research and theoretical approach.

Are such a variety of voices appropriate for an academic paper, especially for a dissertation, when a more neutral, rational voice is the norm for disciplinary meaning-making? This is a question central to writing ethnography at a juncture when issues of audience, authority, and theoretical perspective collide. Jacqueline Jones Royster's Chair's Address to the Opening General Session of the 1995
Conference on College Composition and Communication can serve as a gauge of our discipline. She reminded the assemblage that all her voices are authentic and proclaimed the value of "hybrid people," those "who can cross cultural boundaries." Many voices merge to tell VisionCorps' complex story; you will hear mine—as an ethnographer in a discipline evaluating the significance and credibility of qualitative research; as a woman in professions, the academy and business, still largely defined by men; as a theorist making connections from many disparate factions; and as a rhetorician, sophistic in inclination—and in it others'.

Because of the complexity and variety of my VisionCorps story and rhetorical corporations, I'll transition us to the specifics of the following chapters with a metaphor. In many ways, VisionCorps reminds me of sailing, more precisely, of racing scows. Although a number of elements appear fixed during a race—such as the buoys around which the boats must turn as they make their way according to a set course toward the finish or the rigging of the boats with sheets (ropes) and sails in conventional patterns, according to an association's specifications—most of sailors' decisions, despite a great deal of fore-knowledge, are made totally "in the moment," dependent on innumerable variables and the interaction of a crew, and result in direct consequences. That's life at VisionCorps—in the moment and on the edge. At any second you may be out of the competition completely: your boat can flip over in a gust of wind, or you can sail into a windless hole. Oh, yes, and those buoys and that rigging, they aren't actually stable either.
II. DECENTRALIZING

The refiguration of social theory represents, or will if it continues, a sea change in our notion not so much of what knowledge is but of what it is we want to know.

I want less to prove something. . .than to evoke something. . .

Clifford Geertz
Local Knowledge

In contrast with the classic view, which posits culture as a self-contained whole made up of coherent patterns, culture can arguably be conceived as a more porous array of intersections where distinct processes crisscross from within and beyond its borders.

Renato Rosaldo
Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis

I hurriedly scan the breakroom for an available spot; slip into one of the "handed-down," armed, swivel chairs pulled up to the center table, which is arranged perpendicular to the white screen; place one of my ever-present legal pads before me; and immediately engage the software engineers seated around me in small talk. In this full room of employees, chatting about everyday, late-July activities, I sense the tension beneath the usual banter. They, the 46 employees of this highly-specialized software development corporation, seem to be literally digging in, holding their turf. During the last three and a half years, this breakroom has been the site of many diverse comings-together: monthly company-wide meetings, pizza parties to celebrate quarterly profits, information sharing of internet services and other external and internal educational presentations, wedding and baby showers, and heated discussions of product development plans. Today is unique.

Although thinly veiled as an informational meeting when the announcement appeared in the company-wide e-mail (laced with unmistakable hints for required attendance), the real intent of the meeting is complex and also confused by both the presenters and the audience. In "the old days" before this division acquired its
independence (or semi-independence as some would argue), corporate heavy-weights, such as the two seated with Ben at the first table by the hallway door, called meetings such as this one with regularity. But in the last three and a half years no similar meetings have occurred. The complex dynamics between this spin-off corporation and the parent corporation indicate the basic split in the philosophies held by the new corporation's employees. One faction of employees believes the new corporation needs primarily to maintain its status quo as a third-party vendor for the parent company; the other faction believes their dependence on Parent Corp as their primary customer only needs to be temporary. The one believes, therefore, in concentrating product development, funding and personnel commitment, in traditional "bread-and-butter products" or legacy products; the other believes in developing new products and creating their own, independent customer base. The relationship between parent and spin-off is continually negotiated as their contract is defined and redefined. Both parties recognize their need for one another, but the balance of power is not stable. Gray areas of negotiation include customer support (the reason for the meeting today), marketing expenses and representation, directions for research efforts, and product and documentation standards (for example: In what format does documentation meet compliance? As hard copy or on-line copy? In what database? If compatible for CD-ROM, who pays for conversion expenses?). The software engineers and documentation specialists await the start of the corporate

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1Most of the spin-off's income results from approximately 20, active, tried-and-true money-maker products; in fact, one of these legacy products, for which I wrote documentation, is responsible for almost half of the company's income.
representative's presentation, each with questions specific to his or her interests and with a corporate history averaging about ten years per VisionCorps' employee. The presentation begins with references to that long relationship.

Ben stands and moves from his seat between the two visitors toward the "head" of the room, the spot next to the overhead projector. This is a typical move since Ben customarily begins company-wide meetings, such as monthly Scoops (fondly named after the ice cream scooped from ten-gallon, cardboard containers at the end of the meetings when employees mill around digesting their treats along with the latest company developments or carry cones back upstairs to maximize their computer time). Standing next to the overhead projector, which has been replaced for most internal company presentations by an LCD unit, Ben seems hesitant. A young 50ish, as are the two other owners, he is the president of the company. His position at the intersection between VisionCorps and Parent Corp has never appeared more delicate. Respected by the employees as "one of them," he keeps his office door open and encourages discussions about problems and new ideas; lingers at the coffee maker to chat about local news, his children's activities, and rock and roll bands (a remnant of his youthful, guitar-playing, band-leading days); and recently began a Scoop by tearing the buttons from his dress shirt to reveal the large, red "S" framed by a yellow triangle against the bright blue background of his superman t-shirt. But fostering intra-company morale is not his only duty. With unusually quiet reserve, he simply says, "We've invited corporate representatives from Quality Support down today to talk about UCFs" (forms that track responses to

\(^2\)Of the almost 40 people in the room, only six are women: three documentation specialists—including me, one software engineer, one customer support representative, and one distribution assistant.
customers' inquiries and problems). Although his tone seems to ask for the group's cooperation, Ben's raised chin and defiant glare challenge the resistance with which he is met. Later, upstairs, questions float among the software engineers about who invited whom and whether "invite" was accurate for the situation.

The representative moves toward the front of the room as he attempts some insider kidding based on his long-term relationship with Ben, but his ice-breaker is met with cool silence, and he moves immediately into the reason for the meeting. "I want to talk about client relationships. We think we know our customers, but don't know enough. My title today is 'Client-Service: Where are we going?"" As he flips on the overhead projector, the first of the red, white, and blue transparencies fills the large screen behind him. His second transparency outlines his talk. He comments on each of the following major points, all essential components of Parent Corp's current "Values Criteria":

- **Client Dedicated**—"My focus in this talk."
- **Results Driven**—"We want to improve measurement of our products."
- **Innovation**—"This is intelligent risk; you're a little ahead of us here."
- **Team Driven**—"We find this easier to spell than to accomplish."
- **Fast Cycle**—"What we mean is reasonable time."

His talk develops the first of these points as he breaks "Client Dedicated" down into five sub-focus areas. After admitting that "we've not done too well with client satisfaction because we may have been putting too much into our products," he quickly arrives at his final sub-focus area: UCF Responsiveness—the real reason for his being here today. In VisionCorps' spin-off contract, the new company agreed to provide customer support for certain software products, and as a
number of employees admitted to me later in the day, they aren't very good at taking care of these forms—at achieving "closure." Therefore, the tension in the room, at least in part, can be attributed to the employees feeling as if they are being reprimanded and to Ben's (willing or unwilling) part in this confrontation. But the tension is also due to other factors, such as residual hard feelings for the closing of the satellite plant from which VisionCorps emerged and for contract terms that now seem unfair and include some of the issues involved in UCFs.

As he comments about UCF Responsiveness, the representative begins relegating customers' problems to "standard defects." He defines the company's standard as "one defect per line of code."

Matt, a quiet, determined software engineer, challenges with the first interruption: "Could you define a defect? Errors in lines of code don't address client usability."

The representative responds, "Could we get to that later?" and moves on with his prepared presentation. He talks next about customer surveys to measure satisfaction, but he admits that none of the VisionCorps' products will be included in the surveys. This segment of the presentation is typical of the majority of his material which must have been prepared for another purpose and doesn't hit the mark with this audience.

After more than an hour, our presenter picks up his pace as he plows through his stack of colorful transparencies. "Currently, when we get a UCF, the form goes through 11 stages, taking about 30 days for a fix. We need a way to shrink that time. People power won't get time reduced; we need a new tool." He continues animatedly about the "in-the-works Client Dedicated Service Architecture." He presents this tool—potential software—as the solution he
offers for attaining the company's goals and meeting the requirements for customer satisfaction.

"What about the 11 stages?" someone asks.

The representative smiles, "We have more reorganizations. . . (laugh)
. . . just part of the dynamics of big organizations." He brushes off any suggestion that 11 stages of passing the UCF form from employee to employee, up and down the sprawling hierarchy and between divisions, might be part of the problem with slow customer response.

Ben, silent since he made the introductions, queries, "Do they still have [code name for a similar software project]? I worked on it in 1989 for a while."

"Well, actually, I'm talking about an evolution; this project, Client Dedicated Service Architecture, was started in 1982 [it's 1995 now]. Let me repeat: people power won't do it; this architecture will get us there. Are there any other questions?"

"You're still not getting at anything more than coding errors," Matt, the software engineer who was put off earlier, continues to push. "Do you have metrics on any of the real customer problems? The stuff you guys are getting, these calls, are about things that engineering never sees and then the problems just perpetuate with each release of the products."

The representative responds, "We need to get that stuff out in a technical database." (Always looking for the tools to do the job.)

And Matt answers, "That may not be what we're looking for or even need to do our work."
"But it takes lots of time to build databases," the representative cautions, perhaps needlessly, since he doesn't really seem to be hearing Matt or responding to his pleas for closer, more immediate contact with the customers.

Finally, the confrontation broadens. Joel, another of the three owners of VisionCorps and the Vice-President of Development, has been sitting among the software engineers and documentation specialists. His quick understanding of most problems and situations, like today's, are deceptively masked behind his clumsy mannerisms and lilting Scandinavian accent. As with Ben, Joel's successful interpersonal skills are supported by his unique personality. He delights, for example, in staging yearly musical performances to mark Swedish Independence Day, by occasionally sharing regional delicacies in the breakroom, and by including the employees of the new corporation in his celebration of authentic, steam-powered threshing days held each October on his farm north of town. Now, Joel hones in on the inappropriateness of the presentation, in general, but specifically for VisionCorps. "So what about this Service Architecture? What does this mean for us? All the way through your presentation you were talking about 1994 goals (which really mean requirements and ultimately, perhaps, costs for VisionCorps if they aren't met), but you aren't supplying any tools or changes in processing UCFs. Your goals and tools don't match. You come up with goals and then say 'this is your problem,' and you just keep pushing this stuff down to people like us."

The room is quiet, but for the first time, a few grins appear on the software engineers' faces. Stammering, the representative tries to explain, but Ben hurriedly steps between them as he offers a quick "thank you."
As the room begins to clear, Ted, the third owner of the spin-off and vice-president of marketing, wanders in, hands in his pockets, grin on his face. He explains that he has been tied up with an international phone call and "knew that they could manage without him." Like most of the conservative, family-oriented employees who have grown strong attachments to their small, Midwest community, Ted, in addition to working with the bare-bones marketing department of five—who jokingly refer to him as ol' Dad—serves as the corporation's liaison to the community through his active membership on the city council, the development board, and the United Way. In the traditional division of company duties—which still runs deep in VisionCorps even with the owners' (and many of the employees') commitment to team-based management—marketing would be exempt from a presentation about responding to customer questions and problems; Ted (as well as the other five employees in his department) reacted with their absence accordingly.

The software engineers and documentation specialists, who have generally been sitting with folded arms, averted eyes, and frequently muffled yawns, drift toward the doorways. An outspoken member of the faction pushing for innovative VisionCorps' products, the software engineer next to me shakes his head and mutters a few more of the comments that have provided an undertone to the presentation. And then, as we head up the back stairs, he elaborates on some of the ancient history that colors his reactions to these Parent Corp representatives.

Moving from Hierarchy: Decentralizing

VisionCorps is the product of decentralization. Responding finally to mounting financial losses, which threatened the company's existence, Parent Corp
initiated plans to strip off satellite development and production divisions and facilities—to "restructure," to "downsize." In the early fall of 1990, one of Parent Corp's high-level managers suggested spinning off the software development division that ultimately became VisionCorps. Suggesting what he hoped would be a mutually beneficial arrangement, he proposed a plan to three of his middle managers (Ben, Joel, and Ted) for a spin-off company created from a nucleus of the existing software development staff. The three managers and the staff they selected would, in many ways, retain their current work positions—their location, their work relationships, and their work on products they had created—and, in addition, be able to create new products and opportunities. As third-party vendors for the parent company, they would

- have an existing customer base—through Parent Corp—for the products they had developed at their site during the previous ten years
- continue to provide customer support for these products and to update them in compliance with Parent Corp's needs
- receive some development support from Parent Corp for enhancing existing products and moving in new software directions
- be provided with minimal financial backing for start-up expenses

Parent Corp, in return, would be able to "downsize" in response to financial losses while maintaining the software needed to support their primary hardware and software products. They also would be able to fulfill their agreements with customers for support of the software products that had been developed at the VisionCorps' site. While not seen as risk-free by the three middle managers, especially in the highly competitive and quick-changing software development world, they were soon convinced of a spin-off's viability, especially because of the
current employees in their software development division whom they hoped to enlist in the spin-off venture.

Soon after the spin-off was officially launched, the following article appeared in Parent Corp's monthly news magazine. For the magazine's readership of diverse corporate employees, other third-party vendors, and existing and potential customers, the article provided the spin-off corporation with public endorsement and explained their identity and business purpose:

Small-Town Employees Form VisionCorps

Small-Town, State—VisionCorps, a company specializing in computer systems management software, began business on January 15, 1991. VisionCorps was founded by former members of the Parent Corp Small-Town Software Development team. Initial products will include the suite of systems management products formerly developed and supported by Parent Corp at its Small-Town operations.

VisionCorps has acquired ownership of 20 software products from Parent Corp, including... Parent Corp will continue to market and distribute the products under an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) agreement and holds a minority interest in the new company. VisionCorps will continue new product development and support existing products. It also plans to develop and market new products within and beyond the Parent Corp customer base.

Officers of the new company are Ben. . . , president and CEO; Joel. . . , vice president of software development; and Ted. . . , vice president of marketing and services. . .

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3For the first months of its existence, one of VisionCorps' most pressing communication problems involved explaining their identity and relationship with Parent Corp; they had to develop responses to questions such as "What does this spin-off mean to me as a potential customer, or as a current customer, or as an employee of another division of Parent Corp?"
Once prosperous, then sprawling, then over-extended, Parent Corp continues to struggle for survival by responding to numerous quarterly losses with cut-backs in peripheral divisions, so that it can concentrate on its core products and identity. And yet, because it needs the services and products of these divisions, Parent Corp is willing to try innovative relationships such as spin-offs. Therefore, Parent Corp and VisionCorps, mostly through trial-and-error negotiations, are finding it necessary to communicate in new ways to create and enhance their now non-hierarchical relationship of blurred and, often, confused boundaries where they are both "customers" and "suppliers" of each other.

VisionCorps' is also determined to stay decentralized. Following the management precepts of corporate consultants and "change gurus," VisionCorps' owners and employees are determined to maintain a staff of no more than fifty. They aim to avoid unmanageable growth and to maintain close, interactive working styles with each other and with their "customers" and "suppliers." Therefore, in addition to optimizing a balance between the amount of work and the resources to accomplish it, the spin-off employs strategies to extend its work force and to enhance its capabilities without swelling its payroll. These extensions include:

- outsourcing, to expand personnel capabilities for producing highly specialized software programs, user training programs, and product documentation
- managing supply-chains, to connect "suppliers," usually other start-up software development companies, innovatively into VisionCorps' product development cycles

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4For corporations to maintain a decentralized, non-hierarchical structure, fifty seems to be the agreed-upon magic number of employees (Peters 260).
customer beta-testing, to enlist customers in strategic product development. These new relationships result in creative, web-like, messy connections. However, VisionCorps is motivated to sustain such relationships, to shorten development and production cycles so their products reach markets faster, to increase opportunities for working more directly with customers in developing products that customers need and want (stylized products), and to create an environment in which employees have new opportunities and responsibilities and, ideally, greater work satisfaction.

Rejecting the ideal of total, hierarchical, centralized ownership and control does not mean an isolated, narrow corporate world. Rather, because of the new spin-off relationship between VisionCorps and Parent Corp and because of other new alliances that extend VisionCorps' capabilities, VisionCorps' owners and employees are less concerned with defining clear boundaries than with extending innovative relationships that support their lean staff. And, therefore, because boundaries are nebulous, the interactions of employees with non-employees cannot depend on the power of ownership. Parent Corp no longer owns VisionCorps, and VisionCorps has no plans to acquire the services provided through outsourcing or product enhancements from suppliers. In over-simplified terms, communication by command for management control over a sprawling empire has been replaced by negotiative communication for self-management among local villages. Although it may never have been a very effective policy or the overt policy even when clear boundaries of ownership existed, management by command provided the underlying foundation in power relationships. Alternatively, VisionCorps' management philosophy for self-managed teams is
complex; I will describe that philosophy in subsequent chapters and raise issues related to changes in communication.

In this chapter, I want to continue building on the introductory narrative, which placed VisionCorps' employees in conflict with Parent Corp representatives as a result of decentralized power relationships. As much as I would like to immerse my readers in VisionCorps, this ethnography, as any other, cannot be exhaustive. I will tell a few of the many stories that I and my VisionCorps' colleagues believe suggest significant, over-lapping communication changes as a result of decentralization; these stories support the following claims:

- Because their corporate boundaries are extended by innovative connections, VisionCorps' owners, employees, and their "customers/suppliers" contend with complex audience relationships for their communications, involving non-hierarchical and shifting power relationships.
- Information is not primarily "gathered" for decision-making by a few managers in "top" positions; instead, information is generated and shared among VisionCorps' owners, employees and customers/suppliers.
- Because clear lines of centralized authority have disappeared, communication decisions involve more employees and complex negotiations among VisionCorps' owners, employees, and customers/suppliers.

Strategizing for Non-hierarchical Audiences

*Because their corporate boundaries are extended by innovative connections,*
*VisionCorps' owners, employees, and their "customers/suppliers" contend with complex audience relationships for their communications, involving non-hierarchical and shifting power relationships.*
As a consequence of decentralization, VisionCorps' spinning off results in significantly changed audience relationships. Although once guided by relatively fixed hierarchies, communication strategies now depend upon analyses of more equalized, yet unstable, relationships. Before spinning off, employees could more easily understand their relationships with other internal employees; roughly, they could rely on an organizational chart to analyze their audiences and then send their communications up, down, or across the hierarchy. This kind of analysis follows standard advice of business communication texts. However, for communication between VisionCorps and Parent Corp, the organizational chart has disappeared; VisionCorps' employees are no longer fixed in rectangular boxes and connected by directional lines. Audience analysis, however, is even more complex for VisionCorps' owners and employees. In addition to more equalized relationships, power for VisionCorps' communicators is always unstable; in fact, many communications are motivated by the purpose of gaining power advantages. Unstablized power relationships are similar to a close sailing race, especially when the boats are tacking obliquely against the wind to make their ways up the course. Because boats cannot sail directly into the wind even though they are required to sail toward a windward mark, they have to sail at angles off the wind. Boats can either sail to the left or right sides of the course to tack against the wind; frequently, boats break tacks to sail in opposite directions at the same time. When boats sail away from each other on their tacks, the advantage—the boat that has the lead or power—often shifts. Each boat is affected by a myriad of influences, both on the boat itself and from external sources like the wind and other aspects of the course. When the boats cross each others' paths as they tack back and forth against the wind, the lead can shift back
and forth as the sailors analyze all of the factors involved in the race, especially as they attempt to out-guess the sailors on the other boats. Because of unstable audience relationships, VisionCorps' rhetors, like sailors, must consider an immense number of factors when making decisions.

Shifting power relations between VisionCorps and Parent Corp and, therefore, audience strategies also depend on many factors: Who needs whom most—at this time (including individual employees' expertise and development support)? Who is negotiating what contract features and how will each corporation benefit or lose? Whose software products are currently generating the most revenue? For example, although a few weeks ago s/he may have been a VisionCorps employee's supervisor, the Parent Corp employee now needs to negotiate product definitions with that VisionCorps' employee who is developing new product features to update other Parent Corp's products. For the next product release, their relationship may be reversed; the VisionCorps' employee may need the Parent Corp employee to provide development support of a needed product function. In their blurred supplier/customer roles, each depends on the other, but not evenly, and not consistently. These negotiations are further complicated because of the numerous, additional, on-going negotiations between VisionCorps and Parent Corp, and because within the VisionCorps corporation, owners and employees disagree about their short-term and long-term needs to maintain their primary customer/supplier relationship with Parent Corp.

Because everyone maintains development and marketing contacts; works on shared projects; supports existing, interdependent products; and is required to meet product and documentation standards and release dates, all of VisionCorps' owners and employees are involved in complex negotiations with Parent Corp.
Although I include examples of across-the-corporation employee involvement in communication as part of the discussion in the other sub-sections of this chapter and throughout the remaining chapters, the following example about Ben, VisionCorps' president, focuses primarily on some of his complex audience strategies. In the description with which I began this chapter, Ben’s multidirectional position is obvious, as are his oppositional audiences.

In his monthly reports to Parent Corp, Ben writes to multiple, complex, and shifting audiences. Because Parent Corp holds a short-term, minority interest in VisionCorps as part of the original contract negotiations, in payment for some start-up financing, perhaps, as a remnant of their earlier hierarchical relationship, Ben writes monthly reports to a Parent Corp liaison. The actual person Ben addresses has already changed a number of times; Parent Corp's middle and upper management is constantly shifting as personnel leave, are redistributed to other divisions, or have their positions eliminated. Since the two corporations are intertwined as far as support and payment for existing products, development of new product features, marketing of common products, and additional gray areas that have arisen since the original contract, Ben's reports are rhetorically focused on issues of on-going, continually reinterpreted contract features. In addition to "informing" Parent Corp about VisionCorps' corporate progress, Ben includes persuasive topics addressing methods and amounts of payment for VisionCorps products, definitions of features and delivery times for product releases, requirements for product and documentation standards, to name a few. Although these reports may seem straight-forward, their content and tone are complex. I'm not suggesting that reports in more traditional, hierarchical corporations are uncomplicated by rhetorical issues, especially when writers and readers realize
that reports do more than send "pure information" up the hierarchy. I do claim, however, that Ben's reports are now additionally complicated by more equal and continually shifting power relationships between the old and new corporations. Ben's reports are also complex because of new, multiple audiences.

Although these reports may, in fact, be mailed in hard-copy form, I and the rest of VisionCorps' employees are accustomed to reading the reports online. Ben addresses these reports, in memo format, to the corporate liaison, "carbon copies" the other VisionCorps owners, and then posts the reports on the primary internal, broadcast (company-wide) bulletin board. Ben's monthly reports, as he is aware, also include all of the VisionCorps' readers. And perhaps, or sometimes, the intra-corporate readers are the most important audience for these reports. Ben's reports impact employees' morale, issues of timing and development cycles, and even individual employment contracts. Additionally, these important, multiple, internal readers want and need to see how the owners are negotiating power relationships with the parent corporation.

Although I have copies of Ben's monthly reports for the years of my research, each paragraph comprises proprietary material and depends on a great deal of technical context; therefore, while I won't reproduce any one complete report, I'll include a few passages from multiple reports to support the complexity of these audience considerations and to provide some flavor of Ben's approach to these interactions. The reports Ben wrote immediately after the spin-off were short and usually dominated by updates of development's progress on specific products. However, in the reports he wrote during my final months of research, about three years into VisionCorps' existence, Ben used this monthly opportunity to state his (VisionCorps') position on issues involving Parent Corp. Rather than
providing new information, he was explaining VisionCorps' stance on existing issues. Although the tone of the reports varied, depending on the current relationship between the corporations, this tone usually reflected the amount of revenue VisionCorps was realizing from Parent Corp, especially it depended on whether Ben felt VisionCorps was being treated fairly. Using his standard headings (Summary, Detail Status, Opportunities, and Risks/Concerns), Ben's reports summarized VisionCorps' position on topics such as the following:

- **Product status.**

  *The x.x release of the x.x platform was released and final tapes were sent on December 20th.*

  Placed in the first or second paragraph, this discussion is usually brief unless Ben feels more detail is needed to explain a problem or a scheduling delay. A statement which may seem to be a simple sentence like the one that follows is actually the culmination of months of internal and external negotiations. The date itself is extremely important as far as meeting contract deadlines. Ben wants Parent Corp to be aware of the release completion and states it as a simple fact. VisionCorps' employees, however, are reminded that Ben is making this statement and that they need to quickly follow up on the many loose ends that accompany a release; a release is never as neat as Ben's statement.

- **Negotiation points.**

  *Amendment X to the Software License Agreement is in progress. This amendment will specifically identify all the products and style numbers that should be used to calculate our royalty payment.*
<Parent Corp representative> has the current action to validate all style numbers.

Actually, everything in the report is related to negotiations with Parent Corps. This category specifically includes contract modifications and usually contains dollar or percentage amounts. Since Parent Corps is still their primary customer, these amounts indicate the major source of VisionCorps' profits, and the amounts are continually being negotiated. Sometimes Ben sounds quite matter-of-fact when he discusses these actions; other times he bluffs or expresses anger or disapproval toward Parent Corp. Because employees are updated at least monthly during Scoops on the financial status of the corporation—on sales and contracts—the employees read this information carefully, translating it into increases or decreases in corporate profits and their incomes. They also evaluate Ben's stance toward Parent Corp and take their cues from their bellwether for their many individual interactions with Parent Corp's representatives.

- Joint development projects.

We have spent a significant amount of time on developing a Parent Corp marketing plan. <VisionCorps employee> met with <Parent Corp representative> and <Parent Corp representative> in <city> in order to refine the plan and get ready to forward it to VisionCorps and Parent Corp management.

Ben often includes the names of employees, both VisionCorps' and Parent Corp's, involved in these projects. Ben and the other VisionCorps' employees are attuned to the shifts in personnel and their responsibilities at Parent Corps. In his reports, Ben acknowledges his awareness of Parent Corp staffing
and tries to firm up "reporting" and power relationships between VisionCorps' individual employees and Parent Corp division representatives. Ben uses this opportunity to establish product "ownership" by crediting his employees with work they are accomplishing, thus establishing a history for innovations and a corresponding claim to the products' potential revenues. VisionCorps' employees confirm their involvement in projects and their relationships with Parent Corps' representatives. They either approve Ben's stance or sometimes respond to him for clarifications or to suggest changes in the way they believe projects are or should be developing.

- Common customers or marketing.

In talking with <Parent Corp representative>, it seems there is still confusion in regard to <VisionCorps product>. At one time we were talking about merging/integrating <Parent Corp product> with <VisionCorps product>. We need to immediately get the appropriate personnel together from both VisionCorps and Parent Corp, plot out a strategy and execute it. Right now, the confusion is holding up the sale of <VisionCorps product> to <customer>.

Ben writes about specific customers and strategies, successes, failures, and potential opportunities. When Ben discusses specific customers, he is again staking out claims or arguing VisionCorps' customer relationships. Customer relationships are complicated because of the spin off and often unclear for both VisionCorps' owners and employees. VisionCorps is required to go through Parent Corp for some of their customer marketing, for other customer marketing they can market directly; in fact, to make things more murky, these customer relationships continually change as one or both corporations reevaluate their marketing and product strategies. Ben's aim is to elicit
maximum, overall marketing support from Parent Corp and yet carve out as much direct customer interaction as possible. As with joint project development, VisionCorps' employees are directly involved in numerous customer interactions; therefore, the employees take their cues from Ben and/or make suggestions to him about the customers with whom they are working. Often, through Ben, the employees complain about the slow reaction time they are forced into because of working through Parent Corp, and they try to exert pressure to speed up responses to customers.

- Support for existing products.

*There seems to be some concern in regard to our UCF Response/Closure numbers. This will be the subject of a separate correspondence and a conference call with <Parent Corp representative> and <Parent Corp representative> will be scheduled this month to review this matter.*

As explained in the chapter's opening description, Ben attempts to generate solutions for this on-going point of contention. Product support is another critical component of contract negotiations and interactions between Parent Corp's representatives and VisionCorps' employees. Ben is usually in a position of cajoling Parent Corp's readers or smoothing over failures of VisionCorps' employees to adhere to these UCF standards. It's a complicated issue and, in addition to its being an uninteresting part of their jobs, it is also one of resistance for VisionCorps' employees; they don't like the hierarchies with which they must contend to satisfy these customer requests and feel that by the time the requests reach them, their reactions are mostly a waste of time and effort. While Ben tries to support VisionCorps' employees on these points, he is also encouraging them to comply.
• Structural changes.

*Development continues to be involved in process definition meetings for distribution and release control. Both of these process teams are making excellent progress. We are also starting to work on processes to better focus on continuation activities.*

Ben shares what he sees as positive VisionCorps' changes, often those involving self-managed teams. He writes about these successes with management changes to provide support that the spin off and its management "experiment" are functioning effectively and that Parent Corps' investment is secure. He may also at times be flaunting these successful team-based processes, especially since all the readers of these reports are aware of Parent Corp's many management difficulties. Ben knows that he is providing recognition and positive reinforcement for VisionCorps' employees and that they delight in letting their former employer know of their successful management processes.

As discussed immediately below, in-house publication of Ben's monthly reports and other reports sent out of the corporation represents an important decision about information "flow" in this decentralized, rhetorical corporation. In one of our conversations, Ben compared "reporting" or the flow of information in Parent Corp—where information is passed from manager to manager throughout the hierarchy and finally a decision is "decreed"—to VisionCorps' communication. "We share lots of things. I don't know what we don't share. They [Parent Corp] hold all stuff tight."
Renegotiating Information Flow

Information is not primarily "gathered" for decision-making by a few managers in "top" positions; instead, information is generated and shared among VisionCorps' owners, employees and customers / suppliers.

With decentralization and the leveling of corporate hierarchies, information is not needed to support control by "top" management as it is in the modernist corporation. Instead, VisionCorps' owners and employees realize the importance of "informing" all employees. The opening description for this chapter contrasts these two perspectives on information flow. The persistent VisionCorps' computer engineer pushes the Parent Corp representative to provide more direct contact with customers, emphasizing his need for quicker and more relevant information. The Parent Corp representative offers no real customer interaction or even timely feedback, only layers and days of routing customer response forms through the corporate hierarchy. In fact, the parent corporation representative only conceptualizes customer/employee communication as an after-purchase response to questions and problems. In Parent Corp's still primarily hierarchical corporation, information, including customer communications, flows through layers of management to the centralized decision-makers/processors and then back again through the hierarchy to the employees whose work most depends on the information. Alternatively, VisionCorps' decentralization eliminates layers of management that separate employees and customers.

Although it may be used only to replace levels of managers in support of the hierarchical flow of information, computer technology, especially e-mail programs and internet services, can also drastically reconfigure the direction and linearity of information. When information flowed up the hierarchy, a significant part of
management's job involved gathering and then reductively synthesizing that information. For VisionCorps and other rhetorical corporations, information, instead of being reduced, is dramatically multiplied as it is shared throughout the corporation.

As a software development corporation specializing in sophisticated information management tools, VisionCorps' employees are internationally recognized experts at creating software tools to monitor and manipulate information. However, even in this highly technical environment, the advent of a new e-mail system is stimulating a torrent of on-line discussion about "managing" VisionCorps' own internal information. The owners' and employees' dilemma focuses on the creation of internal bulletin boards. As bulletin boards proliferate with the new mail system, employees debate the merits of so many specialized "locations" for information. The following is a sample of those discussions:

Announcements of new bulletin boards—

* **By popular demand, another bulletin board has been opened for VisionCorps product discussions. This bulletin board is for new product features, new product names, etc. . .**

* **This new bulletin board will be used by the team developing the Release Process. Messages pertaining to our weekly meetings and any other release issues will be posted here. This new BB makes it possible for all VisionCorps employees to follow the Release Process team's progress at their leisure, and to add comments and suggestions as they see fit.**

* **What does everyone think about establishing another bulletin board for strategy-related issues and research reports? . . .**
Discussion about how many is too many—

* I agree that there seems to be too many BBs. My recommendation is to group the information based upon general concepts and not specific groups. . .

* [read with the author's intended sarcasm] I like the idea of having just one BB. That way people wouldn't have to waste time deciding what information was relevant to their job. They could just read the subject on every message and make a guess. If they want to save even more time, they could just skip to guess relevance and read every message.

* I think this discussion still has legs, despite the hopes of Process-Man that it would die the quiet death it deserves. People's feelings on this issue seem to be directly related to the number of bulletin boards they have personally created. You can guess how many I have created.

The employees intensely batted this bulletin board discussion back and forth for a few weeks, and the topic continues to resurface occasionally. It is a serious discussion with a direct impact on all employees' time and convenience, but it has no easy solution. The discussion revolves around categorizing messages and getting co-workers to read messages. The one commonly agreed-upon aspect of this discussion involves access; consensus demands open access to all bulletin boards for all employees. Employees may choose, however, not to read messages, and some employees more than others want easier/quicker access to messages or to enticing their co-workers to read more messages.

In addition to recognizing the need for alternatives to hierarchical information flow and to issues of technological access to information, rhetorical
corporations are even reconceptualizing "information." Rather than thinking of it as discreet, objective data existing independently, information, from a social perspective, results from and depends on human interaction. As such, information cannot be routed objectively throughout a hierarchy. VisionCorps' porous boundaries allow employees and customer/suppliers more direct, interactive communication and, therefore, interactive development and sharing of information.

Supply-chain management is one of the decentralized innovations that fosters and depends on the development of interactive information. Generally, supply-chain management means the relationships corporations are inventing with suppliers to improve delivery of raw materials or components for the assembly and production of the corporation's products—hard, tangible products comprised of hard, tangible raw materials or components. With supply-chain management, distinctions are blurred as suppliers become part of the corporation's production process; instead of multiple suppliers constantly competing for materials' or parts' contracts, the corporation forms more collaborative and symbiotic relationships with suppliers. VisionCorps, however, does not produce hard, tangible products. VisionCorps' essential "raw materials" and "product components" comprise the knowledge and creative abilities of their employees. Therefore, to extend their staff capabilities without actually hiring additional personnel or buying up competitors, VisionCorps negotiated a link with

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5When packaging for the first VisionCorps' products was designed, rather than typical cardboard boxes, marketing insisted on hand-crafted wooden boxes with a carved corporate logo. This controversial decision stimulated a great deal of discussion about what VisionCorps was actually selling. Most of the computer engineers argued that the products are the software design and capabilities; some included the "explanation," in other words the manuals, as integral to the product. Marketing argued that VisionCorps is also selling their image.
a two-person, start-up company which produces software complementary to VisionCorps' products.

In this new relationship between VisionCorps' employees and Start-Up's employees, information flow is inherent in issues of control and power struggles. Originally, their contract specified that Start-Up deliver, along with the software, appropriate documentation that meets VisionCorps' standards. However, when Sandy (the senior documentation specialist), Joel (vice president of development), and other in-house computer engineers read the documentation for the first product, they agreed that Start-Up's owners were not meeting VisionCorps' documentation standards. They decided Start-Up's documentation would be improved by the same documentation writing and editing cycles as in-house products.

However, to create the interactive communication they were accustomed to with in-house computer engineers, VisionCorps' documentation specialists have found it necessary to experiment with writer/developer combinations. First, one writer attempted to support all of Start-Up's products, hoping that this concentration would facilitate communication and rapport; next, Start-Up's work was distributed among all of the writers, spreading out the frustration and forcing Start-Up's owners to respond to more requests for documentation "input." With each release, additional combinations are explored; the documentation specialists' repertoire of hints continues to grow as they help each other develop new communication strategies. Although difficulties in fostering valuable interaction with busy and/or recalcitrant developers are not new for technical writers, VisionCorps' documentation specialists believe their problems meeting deadlines
and controlling databases were initially intensified by distances and conflicting perceptions of information flow.

While VisionCorps' documentation specialists can usually maneuver around distance obstacles by building e-mail relationships or through individual and conference phone calls, these specialists have more difficulty developing interactive information because of ownership and power conflicts, especially those hinging on issues of early involvement in development decisions and of database control. Because Start-Up's owners were not accustomed to working with others, especially documentation specialists, they originally tried to maintain control of all documentation by piecing out small, disjointed line-changes; by attempting to dominate stylistic decisions; and, primarily, by demanding the right to make changes and additions directly in the documentation specialists' databases of the manuals. Database control, however, is crucial for VisionCorps' documentation specialists. Its loss means documentation specialists spend a great amount of extra time cleaning up after novice users of the sophisticated and customized book-building software and struggling to integrate changes coherently throughout manuals.

Start-Up's owners and VisionCorps' documentation specialists are still negotiating issues of ownership and power, and, occasionally, these issues become important in the larger, messy corporate mergings. However, as long as VisionCorps and Start-Up mutually benefit from their link, the owners and employees will continue strategizing to develop effective communication interactions.
Extending Power for Decision-making

Because clear lines of centralized authority have disappeared, communication decisions involve more employees and complex negotiations among VisionCorps' owners, employees, and customers/suppliers.

My claims about audience complexity and information sharing are integrally connected to changes in rhetorical corporations' decision-making. When maintaining corporate control is primary, employees' audiences are more limited and stable, and information is gathered for the few knowledgeable decision-makers. If a hierarchical structure is no longer valued or supported, decisions need to be made by those most informed, by those with necessary knowledge-building connections, by those who are closest to the problem context—those who have the most at stake. However, in a decentralized corporation of nebulous boundaries, decisions are seldom made in isolation; numerous decision-making complications may exist at any time, for a variety of people.

The decision of Parent Corp to produce all user documentation online is an example of a communication decision complicated by decentralization. Although seemingly significant primarily for VisionCorps' documentation specialists, this decision—on Parent Corp's part and, correspondingly, the reaction on VisionCorps' part—impacts broadly. Parent Corp's goal is to print no hard-copy documentation, instead supplying users with documentation in electronic format for CD-ROM use. With a year's advance notice, Parent Corp mandated that VisionCorps begin supplying manuals in Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) format to meet CD-ROM requirements. Prior to that, manuals were delivered to Parent Corp in both camera-ready, hard-copy format and on-disk as ASCII files.
Joel, the vice president of development, assured Sandy that VisionCorps was contractually required to produce documentation in any format Parent Corp specified and enlisted her help in preliminary fact-finding and decision-making. She learned about the SGML process in general and more about Parent Corp's specific plans by

- Attending informational meetings at Parent Corp's home site (which revealed the unpreparedness and the political maneuverings for this innovation within the larger organization)
- Soliciting bids from independent software contractors specializing in developing conversion tools (specially designed software) to facilitate the translation of existing documentation into SGML
- Tapping into her old contacts at Parent Corp to monitor the status of the project and to learn about alternative possibilities for VisionCorps to meet the requirements

The project is technologically complicated and expensive. Although Parent Corp is developing its own specialized conversion tool for its antiquated, in-house book-building software, the tool will not help VisionCorps; after months of research, deliberation, and substantial monetary investment, VisionCorps had abandoned Parent Corp's book-building software. And SGML conversion tools are not readily available for Vision Corps' new book-building software. Sandy determined that possible solutions include either paying Parent Corp or hiring an independent software contractor to develop specialized tools for converting the manuals. Either would charge an exorbitant fee.

To help in the decision-making process, Sandy attended a week-long SGML class and conducted additional research into this important facet of technical
communication. The issue is also complicated because Sandy learned that, even with workable conversion tools, good on-line documentation requires complete reconceptualizing and rewriting of the existing, hard-copy manuals, which were designed for pages and not for screens. The expense for this kind of rewriting and designing, in time and human resources, is overwhelming for a small company like VisionCorps. Because financial statements are provided to all VisionCorps' employees during monthly Scoops, Sandy and other VisionCorps' employees are aware of financial constraints as part of their decision-making.

This issue is further complicated because Parent Corp's SGML mandates have become a factor in larger contract negotiations between VisionCorps and Parent Corp. Therefore, while Sandy solves technical problems, mostly verbally through telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings, Joel and Ben communicate with Parent Corp liaisons, usually through sporadic, hard-copy memos, summarizing their positions and negotiating time-frames and costs. As discussions drag on, SGML requirements have become a greater point of contention in the larger, on-going interactions between the spin-off and the parent corporation. The documentation specialists, caught in the middle, are unable to plan or implement new procedures.

This dilemma, originating with product documentation, is an example of the complicated negotiations and decision-making in which VisionCorps' employees play key roles—roles that necessitate on-going learning and problem-solving, and depend on sophisticated communication skills. Similar to my other examples, these issues of broadening decision-making power involve the trust of VisionCorps owners and employees for each other. When the clout of the centralized hierarchy no longer exists and employees have more audience interactions, increased
information, and greater decision-making responsibilities, owners and employees are left to depend on each others' good judgments and abilities.

**When Does Decentralization Result in Change?**

As I learn of these communication changes through my observations and interactions with VisionCorps' employees and owners and strive along with them to make meaning of all the decentralized disarray, I am also aware of the seemingly unchanged hierarchical structure of the parent corporation (as I described in the opening vignette) and of other, larger corporations now stretching to extend their corporate boundaries and control. Along with my readers, I too ask, Of what significance are VisionCorps' communication changes? And to what extent are they actually occurring?

I remind myself that the purpose of my dissertation is not to count or gather statistics of multiple corporations in an effort to establish a trend, but rather to study, as an in-depth example, one amazingly accessible corporation. However, VisionCorps does not exist in isolation nor do its corporate structure, management philosophy, and technological innovations. The changes in VisionCorps' communication result from larger, messy, and undefined movements, and of course VisionCorps' own change affects these movements.

The change from what many call "modernism" to what many call "postmodernism" is neither uniform nor teleological—nor easy, and that too is part of my story. Derrida reminds us of the reason for the complicated nature of change: "every particular borrowing drags along with it the whole of metaphysics" ("Structure" 483). Foucault celebrates the multiplicity of change: "to prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but
nomadic" (xiii). Bruner, struggling to describe change in ethnographic writing, revises the relationship of culture and change, describing "culture as always in production, as constituted and reconstituted in every act. . . . as alive, in constant movement" (322). Even in *College English*, Bassett acknowledges that "outside the university the major theme is change" (332), and he urges English departments to adapt and to teach "analytical studies" rather than "training."

As part of postmodernist theorizing, concepts about change are significantly affecting academic disciplines; especially, as Marcus and Fischer explain, "those fields most closely tied in their concerns to describing and explaining social phenomena [are] undergoing complex changes..." Marcus and Fischer suggest that research of social changes has resulted in "strong challenges to reigning paradigms, and to the idea of paradigms itself" (15). These comments about change are especially important for interpretive ethnographic research:

Simultaneously, the problems posed in... works of theoretical discourse are more directly and cogently being addressed in the research process itself, which for fields such as cultural anthropology and history, is significantly a matter of representing in a narrative form social and cultural realities. Empirical research monographs, through self-conscious attention to their writing strategies, equally become works of heightened theoretical significance and ambition. Intellectually, then, the problem of the moment is less one of explaining changes within broad encompassing frameworks of theory from a concern to preserve the purpose and legitimacy of such theorizing, than of exploring innovative ways of describing at a microscopic level the process of change itself. (15)

Significant for my story is not the amount of change but the struggle that change entails, the impact of change on professional communication, and the benefits that will accrue when professional communication teachers consider corporate structures and practices that reflect other than the traditional, hierarchical ideal of scientific management.
Building Access with VisionCorps

It was soon after I first caught wind of the changes occurring at Parent Corp that I began designing my research and writing this ethnography. The small town of under 10,000 people became uneasy when rumors about the community's primary employer—Parent Corp, a giant computer corporation—began to spread, prompting speculation of lay-offs or even the local facility's closing. For me, concern centered on my acquaintance Sandy who worked as a technical writer in the software development division located in this satellite facility. During the fall of 1990, her anxieties grew; when we met at occasional social events, I listened. Then, as the new year began, she was able to disclose the news that, although Parent Corp's local manufacturing and development facility would be closed, three of the key managers were trying to form a spin-off corporation of the software development division. Three months before the facility was closed down, the spin-off corporation became a reality. I continued to listen to my friend in social situations as she reported with guarded enthusiasm the management structure of the new corporation and the ways it impacted her work.

In early March 1991, we met for lunch (the first of what became one of my most valuable ethnographic opportunities for discussing VisionCorps' personnel, events and processes). I explained my interest in conducting ethnographic research in the new corporation with her as my "key informant." Contrary to her usually cautious behavior, she responded eagerly to my proposal, turning down my suggestion to take some time for considering my idea. Her enthusiasm, I learned, stemmed from her being the only writer offered a position in VisionCorps and one of the few women; she was finding her isolation, both in profession and in gender, and many aspects of the transition difficult. We planned a strategy for presenting
my research proposal to the spin-off's president, and she arranged a meeting. The president, Ben, was amazed that their new corporation of under 50 employees represented a source of "academic interest." With only a minimal understanding of what I wanted but with a great deal of trust in Sandy, he agreed, suggesting that in exchange I might have some informal recommendations for them.

The following Friday, March 11, I pulled into the east parking lot of the then transitional corporation. From the announcement in December of the plant's shut-down until the spin-off software development division moved into its new home, VisionCorps was housed in the second level of Parent Corp's satellite facility. In what became the new location—just across the highway and a few blocks further from town—news of the facility's final months would filter across the distance, carried orally by old associates (usually after work in favorite happy-hour locations) and occasionally in writing from Parent Corp (for example, "this will be the final week for direct mail pick-up between Parent Corp and VisionCorps"), and non-verbally by the dwindling number of cars in the once boisterous parking lots. In the midst of driving rain and frequent flashes of lightening, I opted for the visitor's space in the lot closest to the main entrance. Was I a visitor? I popped my umbrella and splashed through the rapidly accumulating puddles. Throwing open the steamy entrance doors, I stood dripping before the massive check-in desk, complete with a uniformed security guard blocking any further unauthorized entrance. For the next few weeks until the move on June 1st, I became accustomed to the entrance security procedure: identifying myself to the person behind the desk, waiting for the person to call up to Sandy's cube, standing patiently as Sandy—identification badge clipped
securely to her lapel or belt—emerged at the top of the stairs and descended to sign me in as her guest in the official log of the day.

Attempting to appear at ease, I walked beside Sandy up the wide staircase and stared, fascinated, at the maze of five-foot-high, sound-absorbent, walled compartments that spread throughout the second floor. I watched as various software engineers wove their ways comfortably from cube to cube and down the narrow hallways, as if following "turns" on some elaborate game board. Sandy commented on the emptiness of the second floor: fewer than half of those previously employed had been offered positions with the spin-off corporation. The employment decisions, by the new owners and by the old staff, had been wrenchingly difficult and effects of the separations lingered and would continue to do so for months. Often in my interviews over the next three years, individual owners and employees would quietly recount the demise of the old corporation and the transition to the new.

Later, after exploring Sandy's well-ordered space and bombarding her with questions, we ventured downstairs for a coffee break in the vast lunchroom. Unprepared myself, Sandy treated me from her stash of quarters to the steaming, vending machine coffee, and we lingered past the accustomed allotment of fifteen minutes. Across from each other in our bright, plastic chairs, she provided background on the satellite's once successful three, eight-hour shifts that provided income for the area's families. On our route back upstairs, we passed what used to be the mini in-house store, complete with safety equipment, including thick, rubber-soled, anti-static shoes, that were sold to hourly employees. I yearned to

6The software industry's tradition of cubed environments runs deep; Tracy Kidder recounts their origin in the tenuous existence of early companies (50). With cubes, an entire company can literally "fold" over night and disband or move to another location.
tour the off-limits assembly areas where such equipment was required but, because of close-down procedures, never gained permission. I was generally restricted to the upstairs domain of the software development division, as were the software engineers and documentation specialists.

When I returned the following week, Sandy handed me the slightly revised document we had drafted, sitting side-by-side in front of her terminal on my first day. The document introduced me to the VisionCorp's employees. We had struggled with words to describe VisionCorps' new organizational structure and management philosophy, which was, after all, the impetus for my research. I finally suggested terms I had read: flattened rather than hierarchical. She had sent the following notice on the company's e-mail:

*I would like to introduce to you Jane Perkins, a graduate student in Business and Technical Communication [Actually, Rhetoric and Professional Communication, but the old Master's level title may have seemed more impressive to this highly technical audience, and it was too late to correct her.] in the Department of English at Iowa State University. Jane will be here at VisionCorps to do research for an ethnographic study which may become the basis for dissertation work.*

*The focus of Jane's study will be the changes that occur in corporate documentation as a result of the shift from a large corporate structure to immediate-based, centrally-structured organization.*[^1] One of the topics receiving a lot of attention in the field of business and technical communication is how this business trend develops. Since VisionCorps is at

[^1]: Sandy's use of "centrally-structured" to describe VisionCorps conflicts with my use of "decentralized." As an alternative to being one of many satellite divisions, she was trying to emphasize its small, independent status.
the beginning edge of this trend establishing a flattened organization which encourages flexibility, autonomy, and entrepreneurship in developing new products, Jane will be looking at how our documentation evolves in our new environment and comparing it to the established [parent company's] documentation. Jane will carry out her study observing our environment without disruption of our daily activity. One of the goals of an ethnographic study is to build knowledge from observations that occur rather than to manipulate the environment.

You will see Jane around my cube on Fridays so stop in and say hello if you have a chance.

For the next four months, I spent from two to eight hours a week in the corporation, getting to know some of the employees, analyzing marketing documents and software manuals, and conducting initial interviews. By mid-July, Sandy was completely swamped; a one-person documentation department could not begin to keep up with the software development teams and their new and updated products. Before talking with me, she approached the three owners to suggest they offer me a part-time position, especially "since I was there anyway and had already learned so much about their documentation."

I hesitated only momentarily to consider the implications for my research, especially issues of methodological credibility, before I accepted a part-time position as a technical communication specialist. After my initial four months of

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8Although I initially spent days analyzing archived Parent Corp software manuals, the focus of my research is much broader. I do not claim to compare communication at VisionCorps with communication at Parent Corp; my research discusses VisionCorps' on-going changes resulting from their spin-off status and new management philosophy.

9Sandy was assuring her colleagues of my unobtrusive research methodology. Although I did not "manipulate" their environment, as in all ethnographic research, I had an impact (see Chapters 1 and 3 for further discussion).
fieldwork, I became, therefore, a more involved "participant/observer" in this spin-off corporate culture. For the next three years, I worked two or three days a week on-site with the understanding that my research remained my primary interest and responsibility. As a more involved member of the corporate culture(s), I benefited from the owners' and employees' acceptance and trust, and my "access" to the culture(s) greatly increased. My fieldwork included the following areas of access:

- Interviews, formal and informal, with any member of the corporation at almost any time
- Development team and company-wide meetings
- Company e-mail, including increasing numbers and varieties of internal bulletin boards
- On-line, weekly employee process documents and monthly corporate reports
- Documents written by the company's strategic planning committee, feature definition committee, and project development committees, multiple and evolving drafts
- Documentation Team meetings: process description and reviews, position descriptions and reviews, hiring procedures, scheduling, technology and equipment decisions, documentation reorganization
- Marketing materials, planning and editing
- Formal and informal social functions, at on-site and off-site locations

Additionally, my impressions and interpretation of VisionCorps developed from my observations of routine activities and informal chats with employees in the hallways, the mailroom, the breakroom, the front desk/reception area, and the parking lot. Lunch-time conversation/interviews and other after-work activities,
primarily with Sandy and sometimes others, depending on our anticipated discussion, became one of my most valuable ethnographic techniques. Most importantly, the access I gained from my part-time position—beyond inclusion in meetings and e-mail bulletin boards—helped me build relationships of trust and respect with employees and the owners.

* * *

I'm engrossed in my first software documentation assignment. As I add to my list of questions and ideas about the manual I'm analyzing, my excitement grows because of the rhetorical complexity of the project and the related questions I will be able to discuss with the computer engineer and Sandy, involving VisionCorps, Parent Corp and their relationship. Our immediate project results from VisionCorps' spinning off: a product that was marketed as one software product before will now have its functions split, with half supported by each corporation and yet dependent upon the other half's functions. My task is also to "divide" the manual.

I glance up to see Sandy standing at the narrow entrance to my cube, "Ready for lunch?"

I shake my head in disbelief; how can it be 11:30 already? In the weeks that follow I'll learn to recognize the subtle sounds of "development" pausing for nourishment and be less surprised by the fleetness of my mornings.

I save and exit from the archaic, command-line-driven word-processing program I'm struggling to learn. (Developed in-house by the parent corporation, it represents a substantial investment from which the corporation appears determined to wring any possible up-front value, even at the on-going expense of the documentation specialists. I often wonder during the first weeks of my new
semi-employed status, "What kind of perverse efficiency is this?") Lunch offers a pleasant relief from my start-up anxieties.

We descend the wide, front staircase, discussing where to eat and whose car to take. While the regulars gather in the breakroom, unpacking the refrigerator and waiting for turns at the microwave, other groups of three or four hurry to the parking lot. VisionCorps functions on a somewhat flexible work schedule with some employees starting their days before 7:00 a.m. and others as late as 9:00 or 10:00. (Everyone operates on the new corporation's honor system which, when all of the over-time hours are figured into people's schedules, is never even close to being abused.) The lunch break from 11:30 to 12:30, however, is ritually inscribed. It provides the employees a jump on competing lunch-ers. The owners' and employees' typical, commonsense efficiency, transferred to the business of lunching in this tiny, slow-paced community where restaurant tables are abundant, seems humorous—and telling.

Having placed our orders with the owner of the family-run deli, who always calls us by name and jokingly tempts us with strawberry pie and carrot cake, Sandy and I settle opposite each other next to a window facing the park across the street. I ask my most pressing questions first: issues about the manual's reorganization and technical glitches in moving the manual's computer files on the LAN between the software engineer and me. We agree to spend some time together, including the software engineer, after lunch. Thinking back to my continually growing list of research questions, I open the main topic of the day: "On the everyday work-level, how's your life different now, without the hierarchy of Parent Corp?"
With a half-hearted laugh, she responds, "This probably isn't the best day to ask me that. It's been a frustrating morning." She pauses, thoughtfully, to think through her impressions. "Because we still have to adhere to the Parent Corp's document format standards (writing and editing to their style guides, all 9 looseleaf notebooks that line shelves in documentation specialists' cubes) and documentation cycle (more about this cycle in Chapter 3), we're still producing the docs the same way. I just don't have a manager who 'protects' my time with reasonable scheduling. And I'm concerned that VisionCorps will try to cut some corners with development and the documentation; I guess I see part of my job as holding the line on the high standards of our documentation.

"The really difficult part is that people don't know for sure what's their responsibility, and a few people are trying to be a part of stuff that just isn't their concern. For example, you know we're considering using other hardware and software for our documentation."

"Yes, it can't happen too soon," I interrupt.

"Well for some reason, Jay got in the act and just decides—on his own—that we should have Macs with Windows. Where's he coming from; he doesn't know what we need."

"Is that a for-sure then?"

"No, I talked to Joel and put a stop to it for now, but it means that the whole issue has to move up on my list of things to address. This turf-defining takes lots of energy. And I have so many new decisions. Some people like this more than me."

"So is it better?" We're checking our watches and heading for the door.

"I'm not sure; I used to get lots more writing done, with lots less stress."
The waitress, the owner's daughter, waves and calls out in what will become her routine closing: "See you girls; have a nice afternoon."

We smile, a knowing look passing between us, and Sandy mutters, "What's she think, we're going shopping or to play bridge?"
III. PROJECTIZING

To a growing number, however, the "literariness" of anthropology—and especially of ethnography—appears as much more than a matter of good writing or distinctive style. Literary processes—metaphor, figuration, narrative—affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered, from the first jotted "observations," to the completed book, to the ways these configurations "make sense" in determined acts of reading.

James Clifford

New questions are being asked of ethnography. Experimental works are being composed. Many if not most of the representational techniques of realist (alternatively, classical) ethnography are now seen by many as dated, naive, and, in a certain light, both professionally and socially indefensible.

... Thus, for example, to look closely at well-received or persuasive ethnographic texts, to their compositional practices rather than through them, to the worlds they portray is to examine how a culture becomes a substantial reality for a given set of readers and perhaps beyond.

John Van Maanen

We're among the first VisionCorps' personnel to arrive. Sandy, Mary, and I—the current documentation team—carry our lunch-time bantering into the large, hotel conference room; intent on relieving some of Sandy's anxieties about presenting to this company-wide gathering, Mary and I chatter distractingly. The room is bright and orderly, but the rows of tables are close and the atmosphere is heavy with cooking oils and spices lingering from the noontime cuisine. We select one of the long, narrow, conference-style tables on the left, arranging ourselves, together, in a row with Sandy on the middle aisle for easy access to the front.

Noting the video camera set up in the back of the room, Mary teases about Sandy's star quality. This event will be filmed for the corporate archives: May 25, 1993, VisionCorps' first Post Project Review.

Although I can sympathize with the owners' decision, Sandy isn't pleased with the timing of this company-wide meeting. She had hoped for a more immediate follow-up on the actual release chaos that culminated during the last weeks of March, but the meeting was postponed a couple of times to allow people a chance to cool off and reflect on the release process. Sandy and others had
wanted revenge, or at least a chance to vent; the owners wanted to set a precedent for learning and improving from reflection on current processes. And the owners hoped to create a healing atmosphere. After all, in the memo distributed a few days previous as a reminder, today is also heralded as a celebration:

VisionCorps
Intercommunication

To: Distribution
From: Joel
Date: May 21, 1993
Subject: Post Project Review Meeting

Just a reminder that our post project review remains scheduled for Tuesday May 25th. We will start at 1:00 PM and conclude around 4:30 PM. The release party will start at that time. All employees are invited to the party.

We will follow the following agenda:

Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management Team</td>
<td>1:00 - 1:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure Team</td>
<td>1:20 - 1:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUI Team</td>
<td>1:40 - 2:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Team</td>
<td>2:00 - 2:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Documentation</td>
<td>2:20 - 2:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>2:40 - 2:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release/Distribution Team</td>
<td>2:50 - 3:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Team</td>
<td>3:10 - 3:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Series Team</td>
<td>3:30 - 3:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Team</td>
<td>3:50 - 4:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrap Up</td>
<td>4:10 - 4:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party begins</td>
<td>4:30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By now each team should have completed their post project review. Remember the review should include the following releases.

Each team should use overhead slides for their presentation.
The room fills up quickly. Precisely at 1:00, Joel (vice president of development) stands, "We have a lot of people to hear from this afternoon; let's keep to the schedule. The most valuable part is already done. That's your meeting in teams to discuss and analyze. Some of you have complained that your analysis to get ready for today took too long. I don't think so.

"I'll kick things off for the Management Team," he pauses and looks around the room with his sheepish, winning grin, "of course, you're really self-managed." He's answered by a few snickers. Sitting across the aisle from us and up a row, Ben, the company president, feigns a blow to the chin, smiles, and shakes his head. Ted, the other owner, is in the back of the room with the Marketing Team, trying to keep them reasonably well-behaved. The employees' on-going question hangs, unstated over the room: "Are we really team-based, self-managed?" It has become a running e-mail joke as the employees negotiate the meaning of the concept of team-based self-management. Usually under a mantle of humor—although sometimes the irony is lost or confused—employees nudge the owners when they are perceived as being too directive or authoritarian. With more hostility, employees often remind each other of the self-managed ideal when someone appears to be getting off-track.

Joel continues, "We realize that getting this first VisionCorps' product out the door was a mess and therefore stressful, but we're learning from our mistakes. Development and Marketing have both made mistakes. And Management takes responsibility too. In particular, scheduling—the timeline—needs improvement. When we started, Development dictated the features in a release. Now we're maturing and realize that we need more coordination with Marketing. Our new Feature Control Team, which cuts across all the existing teams, is the right step
forward. And I admit that sometimes I didn't go through the normal process—last minute features are hard for me to say no to.

"Before I turn things over to Ben, I just want to ask for your cooperation with team organization. I'd like to hear from all of you about how it's going. I do like the twice-a-month scheduled meetings when I get to be with teams. But we need better minute-taking at these meetings, all meetings; we need better documentation."

Joel looks to Ben, whose comments are short and sincere, "What we're doing today is important. We need more sharing."

The teams follow each other in quick succession, flashing their transparencies before the group; outlining the process they used for this first, full-scale release; and fielding questions.

Calmly attentive by all outward appearances—inside, my ethnographer's heart is doing cartwheels. Could I ask for anything more? What a culmination of my three years of fieldwork! Gathered together for this meeting are all of the VisionCorps' employees and many of the more significant and closer "alliances" described in Chapter 2. And as a result of each team's critical analysis of their work, their processes, and their role in the corporation, the teams are displaying and explaining the ways in which they are "writing" themselves. In accordance with Joel's suggestion, each team's designated representative is explaining

- What worked
- What didn't work
- What we should do next time
- Our needs and goals for the future
Although guided by these topics, each team's presentation is distinct, especially in organization, tone, and rhetorical purpose.

For example, about a month earlier when the Documentation Team met with Joel to learn the details of the Post Process Review Meeting, we began planning our presentation. In her initial reaction to these topics, Sandy groaned and asked "Is it even possible to say what went well?" But she recovered, "Oh, okay, I know it's important. But let's emphasize all that we've done in these past few months." That emphasis became our strategy: To show the number of manuals we had written and produced and how that amount relates to our need for improved integration and cooperation with the other teams. Because we had primarily updated existing, Parent Corp/VisionCorps manuals, Mary's and my release processes had gone much more smoothly than Sandy's. We knew that Sandy's concerns would dominate the presentation; however, we had no difficulty backing her up. At the same time, Mary and I planned ways to deflect Sandy's critical comments away from the development teams with which we worked.

During the "party" segment which followed the Post Project Review presentations, both Mary and I assured the computer engineers with whom we work that Documentation's complaints weren't directed at them.

Our first five transparencies list manual titles; the sixth sums up the totals: 41 documents, 7203 pages. We then summarize "our process" and list the following goals for future releases:

- Create realistic schedules
- Improve process with Distribution
- Create better communication with Marketing to ensure all teams have same expectations for product release—dates, packaging, content
• Create processes with Marketing and identify responsibilities as needed
• Improve process with Development for quality of documentation input

Mary and I are pleased with Sandy's presentation. Not only does it analyze this release, it helps to educate the other employees about our work. Other employees—in particular, computer engineers, marketing representatives, and distribution representatives—are accustomed to working with us on their specific problems and documents; they don't have any idea of what our total jobs entail. Sandy's transparencies elicit the hoped-for response of appreciation from the other teams and owners. And we are learning about the other product teams. The styles and the significantly diverse cultures of each team become apparent through these presentations.

The breakdown of the teams, at this point in VisionCorps' existence, reflects the organization of the functional divisions of the Parent Corp software division from which VisionCorps was created. When the three owners painfully selected Parent Corp' employees for positions in the new corporation, they were filling functional work slots in the new organization. The owners knew they needed computer engineers with specialized expertise to support the existing products and computer platforms that would result from their spin-off contract; they also needed some marketing people and technical documentation. Without considering other alternatives, VisionCorps' teams "naturally" formed around these functions: management, development (with further divisions into product teams for each computer platform and suite of products), documentation, marketing, distribution, and technical support.

The core membership of each product team consists of about four computer engineers, often the people who created the original software products.
and who have continued to support those products at this site over the past ten years. Although some reshuffling has occurred with team membership, especially with the spin-off's formation, each team retains a distinct personality, which is evidenced in these presentations. In the days following the Post Process Review, a number of VisionCorps' employees commented to me about the distinct differences they realized, especially between the GUI (Graphical User Interface) Team and the A-Series Team—differences they were never actually aware of before the two teams described their processes in this review. The GUI Team develops new VisionCorps' products. They pride themselves on being cutting-edge and innovative. In fact, they jokingly refer to themselves, in speaking and writing, as "The Pretty Boys," and they enjoy the mystique that accompanies this arrogant image. In particular, this is the team for which Sandy's comments are most intended. Their presentation is organized into the following ten main areas, representing a kind of project timeline:

1) The Overall Process
2) Definition/design
3) Code
4) Test
5) Support
6) Field Test
7) Source Control Make
8) Packaging
9) Documentation
10) Project Management
As their designated speaker discusses their first point, The Overall Process, the GUI Team establishes its theme: customer focus. For them everything originates or loops back to the customer, and they want the fluidity to make that possible. They introduce the following subheadings and then continue to use them throughout their other sections:

- **The Good**  
  "To deliver good products to our customers."

- **The Bad**  
  "No direct input from our actual users."

- **The Cure**  
  "Set requirements directly from users."
  "Establish better dialog with Marketing Team."
  "Create super teams or hyper teams that include anyone who wants to be involved."

Although the team's members admit they may need a more formal process, their priority is creativity or having "the chance to code all the time." To them that freedom can only come with their informality. Perhaps in an attempt to demystify themselves or in support of the corporation's policy of openness, their "volunteer" presenter invites "anyone to come to our meetings and bring any additional questions I didn't have time to answer today."

Later in the meeting, when all of the members of the A-Series Team walk to the front of the room together to present their review en masse, they immediately contrast themselves with the other teams, especially with the GUI Team. This impression of unity pervades their entire presentation. They blend their speaking parts, take turns fielding questions, and draw on other team members for additional comment. They elaborate on the following six-point process:

1) **Definition**

2) **Design**
3) Code (unit test)
4) Documentation
5) Integration
6) Release

As we follow along with their explanation, it becomes apparent that they are describing a highly tuned, synchronized process. They seem to have perfected it; in fact, they comment that "we tried to think of some bad things about this review process, but..." The sentence trails off.

From a documentation stand-point, they also seem to have a more integrated approach for documenting their work and for including a technical communication specialist. From the beginning with their definition step, they—including the documentation specialist—create a definition document that then guides the next five steps and serves as a valuable basis for the draft of the manual.

From behind me, I hear a member of another team whisper enthusiastically: "Their process works; the rigorous process up front really works."

In the midst of product-development team reviews, the Marketing Team interrupts the flow of the afternoon with the most controversial review. In addition to Ted, an owner and vice president of marketing, the team consists of six employees, three who moved from product development teams and three who have been hired within the last year and a half. In a company trying to curtail additions in personnel, this team comprises a high concentration of newcomers. In addition to the combative relationship that often exists between Marketing and Development, some additional animosity is directed from the "tried and tested"
original employees toward these new-comers in the marketing department. Most of the employees and the two non-marketing owners react with surprise and defensiveness when the latest hire—within the last few months—walks to the front of the room to represent the Marketing Team. The audience visibly tenses as she begins addressing the other teams' members; they cross their arms, lean back in their chairs, and glance disdainfully at the three, seasoned marketing representatives in the back of the room, as if to ask: "What's the deal?"

And the hostility grows as she talks to them: "I know it's been a pressure cooker, but for the first time, you've done a pretty good job. I have an advantage though; I've been through new product releases with other companies. But I've never felt more supported—thanks."

In a not very subtle whisper, Sandy observes, "She's speaking like an all-knowing outsider imparting THE KNOWLEDGE."

"Either that or she thinks she's schmoozing us," Mary adds.

The marketing representative proceeds with a lecture on "synergy," ending with a big smile and explanation: "We're always going to be saying, 'Hey, guys, when is it going to be done!'"

The issues Marketing highlights as most crucial indicate the rift between Marketing and the development teams, especially the problems caused by inadequate teamwork and communication:

- We must learn feature content earlier
- We must work with development to set schedules and content
- We must communicate commitments back to development
- We must communicate client reactions back to development
The developers respond to the speaker with directed, argumentative questions, mostly about customers and their needs. Surprised, this novice marketing representative hesitates, stumbles, and is finally rescued when Joel moves along to the next presentation.

Right on schedule, Joel wraps up the teams' presentations with a short summary of recurring needs synthesized from all the teams' reviews: "more realistic schedules, better communication between everyone, and identifying and improving our processes." Ben agrees with Joel about these primary needs and reminds everyone to give him a hard copy of their presentation and to put a copy "out on the LAN" for company-wide reference, "after all, that's what we want—more communication and interaction." Finally, Ted adds his thanks, singling out the Documentation Team because "they have done such a good job bailing everyone out. Therefore, they should be the first ones to the bar. Everyone else fall in behind them."

"That doesn't exactly make up for the stress of the release," Sandy concludes to Mary and me. We nod agreement as we disperse to chat with other team members; I, in particular, am eager to ask follow-up questions and to hear others' reactions.

**Moving from Hierarchy: Projectizing**

To work in teams or not to work in teams has never been a question at VisionCorps. Everyone works in teams and, therefore, everyone writes collaboratively, continually—at least, in our expanded understanding of writing.1

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1Ede and Lunsford identify problems with a unilateral definition of collaborative writing as part of their difficulties in conducting and analyzing their survey in *Singular Texts/Plural Authors*. The problems of defining writing are even more complicated than questions of what counts as collaboration when we do research in the workplace; for example, when I discuss writing and writing processes with computer engineers, they make little distinction between their coding languages and the more standard English in which they inscribe notes for documentation
Rather, VisionCorps owners and employees question, "How can we best support our teams?"

The team environment of VisionCorps is pervasive; in fact, the building was remodeled to facilitate teams. Located in a small, attractive mall at the edge of town and just off a major interstate, the building was redesigned to accommodate different sizes and configurations of teams. It has two, small, one-table conference rooms upstairs which focus on wall-size white boards, and an executive conference room on the main level with a large, oval table, white board and pull-down screen for overhead or LCD use. And the original breakroom has been frequently improved for team use: two long rows of tables have been replaced with smaller, clusters of tables; a wall the length of the room has been covered with white boards; and a pull-down screen has been permanently mounted. At any time, multiple teams, of various sizes, can be gathered throughout the building.2

Additionally, the cubed atmosphere of the employee work areas enhances team activities. Rather than the isolation of individual offices with doors, the new corporation is dominated by the maze of developers' and documentation specialists' cubes upstairs and the smaller marketers' area on the first floor. Just under eight foot square, each cube is separated off by five-foot-high, sound-absorbent, free-standing walls. Although no one complains about a lack of privacy, caused either by sounds traveling or from the easy visibility of the cubes' interiors—especially the glowing computer terminals—employees are sensitive to specialists. While they, of course, can distinguish between the "languages," they make a point of telling me that they consider "writing" inclusively and are often confused by my questions.

2In Liberation Management, Peters suggests that "space management" is an under-realized tool for enhancing effective team work and speeding up projects. His comments indicate changing corporate values: "While we fret ceaselessly about facilities issues such as office square footage allotted to various ranks, we all but ignore the key strategic issue—the parameters of intermingling" (413).
the environment's dynamics, usually speaking in lowered tones or occasionally planning quick noon-trips home for private phone calls. Theoretically, what the environment lacks in privacy is compensated for by a sense of openness and connectedness. With the software engineers clustered by product teams, faceless voices waft above the cubes, and at almost any time, employees' heads and hands can be seen above the cube walls in a "Kilroy-was-here" imitation.

Continual employee interaction and the necessary respect required for living in shared, close spaces dominate the cultural environment similar to the dynamics of a large family. During my more than three years on-site, I have thought of the environment in different metaphors: at first, I was struck by a similarity to mice ricocheting their ways through mazes, but I was new and lacked my own sense of direction; later, I worked with a hive similarity because of its frenetic activity and the adjoining compartments, but with less dependence on the mainframe (queen bee) as the center of activities, the metaphor seemed flawed; and sometimes, I've thought more in terms of a womb. This metaphor seems appropriate because of the close, padded surroundings and the subdued and muffled sounds, and it incorporates the family idea. But many VisionCorps employees, especially if they have an idealized perception of womb-living, would be adamantly against this comparison, seeing the environment as less than supportive and friendly.

Although teams in themselves aren't new to VisionCorps' owners and employees, the pervasiveness of teams and the concept of management by teams is new. The following memo was not written until VisionCorps had existed for

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3 Although the environment is much more private than a panoptigon, the openness does facilitate "management by walking around," whether the management is Joel, or another owner, or members of the VisionCorps' self-managed teams who believe the concept means keeping an eye on each other.
almost a year. Some employees would say that the concept had been part of the culture from the beginning when the owners offered select positions to the start-up, key employees and sought their buy-in and support for the new company. Others would say that the concept is only good on paper and that it has not been followed up on enough. Even others would say that self-managed teams shouldn't or can't be an effective management philosophy. We do know that the idea had been discussed since the beginning and that the owners announced its existence without much fanfare or preparation of the employees.

To: VisionCorps Teams
From: Joel
Date: 01/09/92
Subject: Self Managed Teams

Based on meetings and conversations I have had with many of you, the self managed team concept appears to be well supported. We have therefore decided to go ahead with the concept and have asked [accounting firm's name] to help set up the process. As an initial step, they have asked that we provide them with a list of management tasks and accountabilities that teams will be responsible for. To that end I would like each team to elect a team representative to attend a brainstorming session to identify an initial list. We will meet on Monday at 1:00 PM in the Executive conference room. The meeting will be limited to 2 hours.

Attached are a couple of the articles I might have referred to.

Joel

cc: Ben
    Ted
The memo appeared in all the employee mail slots, with articles attached: "Managing Without Managers: Self-managed teams improve IS [information system] productivity but challenge CIOs' traditional role," *Information Week*, November 11, 1991 [4 pages]; and from the column on "Managing People," the short article "Making Peer Reviews Work," *INC.* October 1991. That was it. A few comments were made by employees as they skimmed through the articles on their ways up the wide stairs; generally, they went about their work as usual. When I talked with employees later, they explained that the memo and the announcement weren't a big deal or a surprise; a few expressed concern that they needed more training to make the concept work. Self-managed teams were officially in place (the hardest part had been convincing the accountants). Changes came a little later, gradually. The question was still: "How can we best support our teams?" And to that question add: "How should they be configured?"

VisionCorps' cultural members have a sense of belonging to a specific team, the one with which they participated in the Post Project Review that you read about in the beginning of this chapter. Basically these teams reflect the functions for which people were hired: software development, documentation, marketing, production and distribution, and information systems support. But these classifications aren't hard or permanent. In its short existence, a number of employees have changed functions, for example from software development to marketing; have even created new positions for themselves; or have been encouraged to move into new positions by the owners. To some extent, then, the employees are accustomed to some fluidity in the make-up of the teams. In

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4Two years later, the owners rented a video tape about successful teams and arranged for all the employees to gather in the breakroom for a two-hour showing.
addition to these basic functional teams (specific, on-going product teams further classify the software engineers), teams are reconfigured as the owners and management strive to initiate beneficial changes.

Two years after the self-management memo, the employees were regrouped into what would appear to be project teams, and given new team names and new e-mail bulletin boards. The biggest differences between the new teams and the old were that the new teams included more employees, all of the people involved in a major project: software developers, documentation specialists, marketers, and distributors. This innovative change in team make-up followed the advice of the experts—the corporate theorists/consultants discussed in Chapter 1—to integrate functions, to include all of those who are directly involved in a project, the stakeholders, on the decision-making team. Basically, the newly proclaimed teams didn't work. Everyone gave them a try for a few months, and then they faded away. The new teams' meetings were long and often covered information that either wasn't relevant to many of those present or required a great deal of repeat discussion to bring individuals up to speed. Often the meetings were only used to report on other meetings, sub-team groups where the real work was being accomplished and decisions were hammered out, or to disseminate information. Although unofficially making decisions and getting the work done, these sub-teams also became a problem, and communication within the entire corporation was questioned. With official teams mandated and yet unofficial teams doing the essential work, many official team members soon felt left out and resentful that they weren't being included. Within a few months, these meetings had dissolved into brief gatherings to discuss release dates. And then the old
teams reemerged, composed of the employees who needed to know and to have input in decisions.

But another kind of VisionCorps' team configures itself; these teams are usually short-lived, lasting at most a year and often only a few weeks; they are often formed by the employees themselves because they have an idea they want to sell and implement, or a problem that needs solving; and often they include employees with a variety of functional backgrounds and expertise. These teams include the sub-team groups who were meeting to accomplish the necessary tasks during the more formal, mandated, and short-lived new teams. Actually, these teams are better examples of the project-team theory as described by the corporate theorists/consultants. They seem to be viable because the teams are formed for a specific purpose and composed of invested stakeholders.

Therefore, VisionCorps is managed with both a somewhat permanent structure of functional teams and more fluid project teams. Additionally, the owners and employees are open to new possibilities of combinations and attempts which they generally approach with confidence. Moreover, in all of these team configurations, self-management is the goal. Joel's following e-mail message sums up this philosophy:

> While I am absent from 3/22 - 3/26, Jack will be watching my mail.
> Otherwise manage yourselves like you usually do.

> Joel

In a corporation of self-managed teams, the rhetorical situation is changed. The primary communicative audiences are peers, often collaborators on a specific project. And specifically in cross-functional, project teams, those peers—although usually focused on the same goal—bring different backgrounds, education,
experiences, and perspectives. As the ability to communicate effectively in teams is recognized as primary for conducting daily operations and business, VisionCorps' communication is changed and continues to change. Relatively little effort goes into communicating up or down the ranks or into gathering information—there are no ranks, only "associates", and the owners and employees are much less concerned with "gathering" or even disseminating information than in creating it and putting their ideas to work to solve problems.

In the next two sub-sections, I develop more specific examples of VisionCorps' teams to argue the significance of communication changes in this rhetorical corporation. Specifically, my stories will support the following claims about communication at VisionCorps:

- Although VisionCorps' owners and employees conduct business based on a corporate structure of functional teams, they also frequently configure themselves as cross-functional, project teams to solve problems and initiate changes; these more fluid project teams are highly charged rhetorical groups whose members generate ideas, "sell" them to each other, and depend on the rhetoric of "stakeholders" for resultant actions.

- To facilitate the self-management of these teams, the owners and employees value and learn from their self-reflexive analyses and evaluations, both as they "write" process reviews and as they share them with others throughout the corporation.

\*All of the employees' business cards have the title of Associate. Sometimes they joke about this title and its nondescript nature, but no one complains.*
Creating and Recreating Fluid Project Teams of Stakeholders

Although VisionCorps' owners and employees conduct business based on a corporate structure of functional teams, they also frequently configure themselves as cross-functional, project teams to solve problems and initiate changes; these more fluid project teams are highly-charged rhetorical groups whose members generate ideas, "sell" them to each other, and depend on the rhetoric of "stakeholders" for resultant actions.

Anderson writes about "stakeholders" in his textbook for technical writing because he wants students to understand the broad influence of professional communication and to consider all of the people who might possibly be affected by a document, not just the writer or the reader(s). His use, therefore, is especially helpful for encouraging students to think about big communication contexts and about complex ethical implications. His stakeholders have something to gain or lose because of the communication. Couture and Rymer also write about stakeholders relative to professional communication. In their research of "situational exigencies, or key contextual elements, that shape the process of workplace communication" (4), they differentiate between career writers who "tend to document others' activities without having the central responsibility for invention or the personal stake in constructing meaning that is characteristic of professionals who write" (10). Although Couture and Rymer don't actually use the term, they too are referring to stakeholders. To the idea of stakeholders as those affected or those somehow invested in the communication, Couture and Rymer add accountability. "Stakeholder" is a helpful term for thinking about professional writing and for discussing workplace teams, and the rhetoric of stakeholders is an important distinguishing feature of project teams and their communication.
Project teams not only configure employees in new combinations for their creative problem-solving potential, they also rely on stakeholder investment and accountability.

To illustrate these points, let's consider VisionCorps' functional Documentation Team and one of VisionCorps' short-lived project teams. Primarily, the Documentation Team makes decisions about writing and production processes for the user documentation of the products—user manuals. The minutes of team meetings and my fieldnotes concur that, in order of the amount of time spent on each, these Documentation Team decisions include issues such as the following:

- **scheduling**: who writes what, when, and with whom
- **technology**: what equipment is purchased and how it is used; also what software templates are created and changed
- **personnel**: when additional documentation specialists are needed, who is hired (including editors and production staff), what do the positions entail
- **processes**: how the work should be done, and in review how the work could best have done

For all of these activities, the Documentation Team—using some form of collaboration—writes relatively few documents: informal scheduling plans (often on scratch paper and reproduced on a whiteboard, these schedules are initial drafts which are then coordinated with other teams' schedules and entered online); notes, again often on the whiteboard, which reflect the working-out of technology problems; position descriptions and job ads (also, as with all the teams, an employee evaluation form); documents to guide production and editing processes, and review documents (including ISO9000 process descriptions). All of these
Documentation Team activities and documents serve the primary purpose of producing user documentation. The documentation specialists also write and edit additional documents, from online messages to solicit answers to questions about the software products, to marketing descriptions of products, to conference papers prepared by software engineers. Categorizing these team activities and documents is difficult, partly because of overlapping aspects of the activities but also because the activities usually involve more than the team functions. For example, decisions are discussed in the team meetings and as a result someone makes online changes to a database schedule or to a software template; who is writing? When? The categories or questions are seldom neatly defined, as they often appear to be in surveys of the profession or in the analyses of these surveys.

However, a certain routineness exists that allows me to discuss these activities and documents. And within that routineness, the Documentation Team addresses many "significant" issues. Often these significant issues motivate the formation of project teams. During its first two years, as VisionCorps established itself as a viable corporation, it developed numerous new product features and increasingly, in addition to mainframe technology, added computer platforms for these software products and new features. Accompanying the success of these developments, however, is the problem of updating all of the products on all of the different computer platforms with the new features. Since new software products and constant innovations for existing products are the lifeblood of the business, documentation for these changes is critical. The problem for documentation specialists is that updates for documentation then become exponential as changes must be included and customized for platform-specific products and their documentation. For example, instead of updating one software manual with
information and directions about a new feature, a documentation specialist might be required to update three, four, or five manuals, each with slightly different, platform-specific information. And although a release cycle is typically a six-month process, many times release cycles and new features overlap, causing additional confusion and overload of the production process as computer engineers and documentation specialists manage multiple releases, in varying stages of completion, at the same time.

The Documentation Team wrestled with this problem of multiplying platforms and releases and its drain on documentation resources. We discussed its significance during our bi-monthly team meetings and commiserated between times as the workload grew and the potential for error became more likely. We experimented, using hidden text to switch back-and-forth between platforms, but there were too many platforms and too many variations. Weeks and months passed. Sometimes we included Joel in our discussions and our search to simplify the update process. Finally, we realized that our best option was to restructure the manuals. We could write a more generic base manual and then include an additional, smaller, platform-specific, manual for each product. We knew our "solution" wasn't perfect, but because we didn't have the personnel to continue with our current process, we decided to try to sell the idea to the computer engineers, marketing representatives, and release coordinators—those most affected.

We ran the idea past Joel to get his reaction and, based on his support, discussed ideas about the individuals we would need to include for this decision and its implementation. Our plan was to keep the group as small as possible but to include all those most affected by this potential change—the stakeholders. In
detail the Documentation Team formulated a list; our criteria included those whose products would be supported by a new documentation process and new types of manuals, and just as importantly, those whom we thought could be convinced, because of the logic of the decision, and the lack of alternatives. Sandy sent out an e-mail message asking ten selected employees, in addition to the Documentation Team, to join us to discuss this problem—the project team was formed. We also began to discuss our ideas informally, with software engineers and marketing representatives.

This group, or project team, met formally three times, and also informally, in impromptu fashion in the breakroom and the hallways. For some reason the larger meeting rooms were in use the day of the first scheduled meeting, and we crowded into a small, upstairs conference room, bringing in extra chairs and huddling around the table (for the other meetings we continued to gather in the same, tight-fitting room). However unintentional, it wasn't a bad strategy for bringing everyone together and for keeping the discussion relatively low-key. We presented the problem and our potential solution.

The computer engineers listened carefully to our details, asked questions, and added to the discussion with their own concerns. They voiced what to them seemed an overwhelming concern—their customers. They believed that the documentation specialists' overload of work in matching updates to computer platforms was, unfortunately, justified because of customer usability. As one computer engineer explained, "We know that our customers are smart and could probably figure out how to use the two manuals together, but it's not what they're used to and we have a solid following of customers. How can our documentation show screens in one manual when they aren't the screens they would actually see
on their computer? It seems too confusing." Even as we dispersed to our cubes, discussion continued, through to the next meeting.

The "solution" was modified: all the screens could be made obviously generic to avoid the confusion of users' expectations of matching their own screens. And re-evaluated. The marketing representatives, while less vocal or invested, wanted to ensure that their customers would not be unhappy, and mostly supported any innovations that would cut production time. Project-team members discussed online the advantages and drawbacks of the various options, using the company-wide bulletin board; they didn't really need their own bulletin board since they had no formal name, or set time to meet, or even "official" membership. As the discussion continued, the computer engineers began to realize that they too would have to spend less time proofing documentation for editing cycles if the manuals went the more generic route. Slowly, the computer engineers agreed to a prototype manual, starting on a small-scale to see if the idea was feasible from a customer-satisfaction perspective. However tentative, the computer engineers, marketing representatives, and distribution coordinators were "sold." The project team coordinated plans for implementing the new structure of the manuals, which information to put into which manual, in what order, etc.

The more generic documentation approach moved ahead. Even more significant implications, however, resulted from these project team meetings. The meetings emphasized difficulties that were emerging and affecting the employees, of all functions, across the corporation. The larger impact of this informal project team is a change in the philosophy behind the development and support of the numerous platforms. The cross-functional team members realized that they
needed to simplify their approach and that they might be able to aim for more
generic feature development. They agreed to increased coordination of their
feature development efforts to make the innovations more uniform across
platforms. In other words, documentation specialists have to document the
features and the processes developed; their job is easier if changes are made in
what they have to document. Although making life easier for the documentation
specialists isn't the driving force in computer engineers' work, it was the
motivation for this corporate-wide change. This short-lived project team produced
few documents; they wrote and planned extensively on the white boards and
discussed often, face-to-face and online, and because of their self-managed
approach to their work, they significantly changed the future documents of the
corporation.

While I don't mean to suggest that the functional Documentation Team
does not solve problems, engender internal conflict, or rely on rhetoric—in fact, in
many ways the functional team is just a shell in which fluid project teams are
formed and dissolved as specific problems are solved. All of these aspects,
however, were heightened in the short existence of this specific project team. This
story emphasizes not that all the traditional means of communication are
disappearing but that rhetorical corporations need additional ways to problem-
solve and communicate. The differences, then, between the two teams can be
discussed in general terms by focusing on writing contexts and discussing writing
processes and documents as "routine or significant" (Couture and Rymer 4). This
distinction is made by Couture and Rymer in designing and analyzing their survey
about composing processes on the job. While their survey assumes that an
either-or dichotomy of situational exigence designates the writing of professional
writers as routine and that of professionals who write as significant, my story suggests that this clear distinction does not exist at VisionCorps. Writers in rhetorical corporations—professional writers and professionals who write—write both routine and significant documents. While a great deal of the Documentation Team's activities and writing involves the routine, these professional writers formed the project team because of a significant need, and they "sold" their innovation to the other team members, partly because they were able to convince their peers of potential benefits for all those involved.

**Facilitating Self-Managed Teams through Process Reviews**

To facilitate the self-management of these teams, the owners and employees value and learn from their self-reflexive analyses and evaluations, both as they "write" process reviews and as they share them with others throughout the corporation.

During the time of the New Team configuration, communication problems became an issue for the owners and employees of VisionCorps. As I explained earlier, part of the perceived communication problems were caused because the new teams weren't working well; they weren't actually addressing issues, solving problems, or getting work done. Therefore, unofficial sub-teams formed, and as a result, many employees became suspicious of factions, of being excluded from decisions, and of generally not knowing what was going on. To counteract this problem, the owners (or possibly the strategic planning committee, which included additional employees) suggested that all the teams report on "their progress" at the monthly company-wide meetings—the Scoops. Everyone is expected to attend the Scoops (lots of work is not a viable excuse); the employees gather at 12:30 in the breakroom for an hour or longer on an announced date, once each
month. The formal meeting component is followed by the usual ice cream cones, "scooped" by either a new-comer or an employee selected for some "celebratory" reason. The owners, aided by the LCD or sometimes transparencies, update the employees on the state-of-the-company, usually beginning with the financial picture, and announce new developments, events, etc. To this established format, the new teams were encouraged to add information about their "progress." The new teams' reports lasted for two months, and then the employees refused to continue them, not with any dramatic confrontation; they simply said the reports weren't working and didn't do them.

Mostly, the new team reports weren't continued because the employees decided they were a waste of time. In their overly committed, project and deadline driven work-lives, the employees quickly pare down any activities they don't find valuable. The employees didn't understand who the audience for the reports was or what purpose the reports were supposed to serve. Whom were they reporting to? Why? If they were just providing project updates, the employees were already inputting that information in the company-wide, online timeline-activities spreadsheet. Anyone in the company can read any part of that "living" document, any time.

In contrast to these new team reports, which were abandoned for many reasons, as were the new team configurations, the Post Project Reviews, described at the beginning of this chapter, are working and continuing. While the Post Project Reviews are much more prestigious, I don't believe that is the reason for their success and value. The owners and employees know that they are the audience for these reviews and that their purpose is important: to analyze how the teams worked through the release process, to consider problems, and to
suggest improvements. The emphasis for these reviews is on self-reflection. In a
corporation of self-managed teams, these reviews (oral, online, and printed, at
least as transparencies) are important for improvement. Theoretically,
employees improve from self and team assessment, from learning about the other
teams and their processes and by building on this knowledge, especially for
integration of teams.

In the Post Project Reviews, the common problem or need for improvement
mentioned by almost all teams was improved communication and integration of
teams so that, for example, release dates and feature updates could be agreed
upon by all and more easily met. Their analyses and evaluations highlight their
need for increased interaction and more flexible configurations of teams.
Interestingly, when the self-managed concept was introduced and "brainstormed,"
employees perceived this kind of fluid interaction. The following is from a hard-
copy memo written by Joel as the follow-up to the initial, brainstorming meeting.
This meeting is also mentioned in the "self-managed team proclamation" memo,
included earlier in this chapter:

To: VisionCorps Employees  
From: Joel  
Date 01/12/92  
Subject: Self Managed Teams

The attached represents the management tasks for self managed teams which
resulted from the "brainstorming" session held on Monday, January 13.
We reached a plateau of agreement in that the members in a team need to be
able to work together in order to perform the identified management tasks.
Normally this will mean that team members share common deliverables
and/or processes and have sufficient interaction so that effective peer performance reviews can be performed. It was pointed out that interaction with members of other teams in some cases may be equal to or greater than the members in one's own team. In these cases, peer reviews among members of other teams would make sense.

Two important conditions for VisionCorps' success with self-managed teams are forecast in this memo: that team membership may be fluid and interactive, depending on team needs, and that the team members would be part of peer reviews. Although, as this chapter describes, management styles are difficult to change, this description and the stories I have told here argue that VisionCorps' management is a long way from that which supports functional divisions of traditional hierarchies. And the communication needs are different; reports are no longer the primary form of inhouse communication, intended to gather and pass information up a hierarchy or to disseminate it downward. VisionCorps' employees need and create communication processes and formats that promote problem-solving and interaction. These communications depend on the rhetoric of stakeholders for resolution and on the commitment of self-reflection for improvement.

**What's the Relationship between Self-Managed and Projectized?**

I've discussed a number of different kinds of teams in relationship to VisionCorps: functional teams, product teams, project (cross-functional) teams, and self-managed teams. Part of my difficulty is that the teams in actuality aren't clearly constructed to fit these terms. However, because it indicates the flexibility and responsiveness of their management theories, this problem is also the strength of VisionCorps' approach to teams. Underlying all of the owners' and
employees' actions about their team approach are the questions: How can we best support our teams? How self-managed is VisionCorps?

While these questions provide admirable guidelines for team considerations and changes, they also indicate the unsettledness within VisionCorps as the owners and employees continually adjust within their self-managed approach; for many employees this management approach is far from easy. It demands a higher level of commitment of employees to their job, a personal accountability, and a constant interaction and dependency on others. Some employees still complain, although less frequently, that they need more training in this kind of self-management and personal interaction to make it work, and sometimes these same employees react to what they feel was a decision thrust upon them. They explain that they didn't sign on to this kind of management but expected to work in the old hierarchy they were accustomed to at Parent Corp. Primarily they miss the layers of management "protection" that buffered them more from deadlines, pressures, and troublesome decisions and co-workers. For example, about a year into the new corporation, one of the documentation specialists continually suggested that Sandy be designated the documentation manager so that Sandy could handle all of the decisions and the others could concentrate on writing manuals. It didn't happen; instead, the team's responsibilities have become more equalized and inclusive as that documentation specialist has grown into her position and has become more a part of VisionCorps. Also, many times employees are overwhelmed at the amount of time they spend in meetings and working with others, especially as they create layers of overlapping teams. And then if they choose not to attend meetings, they feel a loss of control and an inability to accomplish their work because they haven't been in on problem-
solving and decision-making. They are still confused about how to configure
teams, especially when they try to formalize their structures. In addition to these
considerations, the biggest problems are how to reward employees in this self-
managed team environment and how to integrate new employees into the
corporation.

Teamwork, collaboration, becomes more complicated when rewards (and to
some degree accountability upon which the rewards depend) are part of the
dynamics. Recognizing this problem area, VisionCorps' owners and employees
have moved cautiously to create methods for evaluation. The owners use
evaluation more for individual improvement, for reinforcing their valued
employees, and for creating new employee challenges and opportunities. The
owners are primarily motivated to keep their highly qualified and uniquely skilled
employees happy. In the first months of the corporation, the teams were asked to
create—to write—job profiles as criteria for their positions and evaluation forms.
Employees fill out forms and comment on their own work and then ask two or
three peers also to write evaluations. The owners try to keep the process low-
keyed; they focus, for example, on what the employee would like to accomplish in
the next year. The owners also attempt to separate the salary increases and
bonuses from the performance reviews. But these "rewards" are often still a
problem in an environment where employees work hard and contribute long,
pressure-filled hours.

Partly because the corporation is still new and committed to remaining
relatively small in numbers, the owners and employees are finding it even more
difficult to successfully add employees. In this self-managed environment, hiring
is a team activity, with the future team members most responsible for hiring
decisions. VisionCorps' employees are finding it difficult to resist filling new positions at "the bottom level." They are tempted and do hire new employees for the more routine work—the work they don't necessarily want to continue doing, rather than for more innovative or "glamorous" work—and as such they are reinforcing a hierarchy and not necessarily hiring the most capable people or the people most suited for a team-based management style. In addition, VisionCorps' owners and employees have given little thought to training new employees.

Even with all these lingering problems and constantly evolving problems inherent in this team-based management approach, the owners and most employees are committed to it; in fact, they would not consider giving up what they are working hard to create. The questions are inherent in this approach: How are teams best configured, and added to? How can team members be most effectively rewarded? How can self-management be facilitated?

**Writing VisionCorps**

In this theoretical/methodological section, I'm going to concentrate on textualization as integral to interpretive ethnography and specifically explain some of my strategies for writing VisionCorps' communication story. It may have been easy to understand why I talked about access in the previous chapter on decentralizing, since they are both jumping-off places to this ethnography; however, you may wonder about the connection between textualization and projectizing. Why does this discussion belong with this chapter? With this arrangement, I am emphasizing two similarities between interpretive ethnography and changes in workplace communication. First, writing—the writing process, or textualization—needs to be considered in more inclusive ways, especially for writing interpretive ethnographies and for studying communication
in the workplace. In the introduction, I made the connection between
textualization or writing awareness and ethnography. In this chapter, I also
suggest that we need to interpret communication more broadly and holistically to
learn about professional communication, in particular to understand changes in
communication and, as professional communication specialists, teachers, and
researchers, to influence those changes. Second, my arrangement highlights the
importance of self-awareness of writing/communicating for knowing. The same
awareness that is impacting ethnography as researchers realize they are writing
"the culture" is also integral to the management theories of rhetorical
corporations such as VisionCorps. In the beginning section of this chapter, you
read about VisionCorps' first Post Project Review. Events such as this first one
have become an important part of the VisionCorps' culture because everyone, not
only the three owners but the employees, realizes the importance of analysis and
review of their work and processes as they continually redefine their existence—
who they are, what they do, and where they're going. They have built this analysis
into documents that drive their review process and that recommend changes.
These reviews are shared in the most open corporate forum and are then archived
for reference and for building a corporate history.

Specifically in this section, I explain a few of my writing decisions as a way
to focus attention on "looking at and not through" my ethnographic text. I'm not
attempting to establish any kind of standard or model for interpretive
ethnography⁶; rather kairotically, my writing analysis/reflections help me tell an
ethnographic story of VisionCorps to professional communication readers. My

⁶As I said in Introducing these theories and contexts, interpretive ethnographers have no
models; they must build their own paths and connections to make sense of what they are doing
and who they are studying.
focus on textualization, and especially my discussion of textual/representational strategies in this section, is one of my means for communicating with my readers my beliefs about doing ethnography. I am, therefore, emphasizing the "showing, not telling" of ethnographic theorizing and drawing attention to the writing, especially in ways "that announce to readers its impact rather than its neutrality and distinguish it from the traditional." I am interpreting for my readers a few of my narrative techniques. Because many professional communication readers have journeyed to our sub-discipline from rhetoric and composition or are often referred to, at least in the workplace, as "wordsmiths," it may seem unnecessary to focus on writing or on textualization. However, I believe that textualization highlights a paradox in the way professional communicators often consider writing. Traditionally, professional communicators have had as their goal—even their "creed" to make writing invisible, a neutral conduit for passing along others' ideas. Or in an effort to make writing more than "mere" style, communication theorists have generally ignored style, discussing instead other aspects of writing. However, textualization has profound implications for professional communication. Ideas about textualization remind professional communicators, like ethnographers, of the need to "look at and not through" their writing. We too need to ask: "What am I doing/saying with my writing?"

Spurred by composition's process movement, we have asked: "How do writers' write?" And writers answered: "with pens or computers, linearly or recursively, alone or in groups." Interesting, but not the answers of interpretive

7From the sub-section on "Textualization" in "Introducing."

8In "Technology Transfer: An Antifoundationalist Perspective," I cite Rorty, Poster, and others who claim the traditional ideal of technical communication as efforts to describe scientific ideas in value-free, neutral language; see also the Professional Communicators' creed of the Society for Technical Communication.
ethnographers or those looking "at" their writing—writing in the sense of meaning-making, of interpretive representation. "How do you write?" And "writing" suddenly is broad and inclusive and suggests strategizing, decision-making, and critical thinking; and, yet, this writing question is also specific, dependent on the stylistic fine-points embedded in all those thinking decisions.

The following, then, are some of my writing decisions for telling the story of VisionCorps in this ethnography. While I can't discuss all of my decisions of interpretive representation, I include those which seem most significant and, usually, most problematic. My decisions about authorial presence, voice, tone, and arrangement depend on my (our) bigger decisions and problems with the concepts of narrative and analysis.

Professor: "In the narrative part of this chapter..."

Me: "Where? I don't understand which part you're talking about?" I mentally page through the chapter, guessing that he means the beginning pages.

Professor: "In the middle here, you also need analysis. You need to make sense of what you're describing."

Me: "H-m-m. I thought was analyzing." Oh, no, here I am teaching an upper-level course in rhetorical analysis, and I don't even know what analysis is any more. Is it stylistic? Is it my mental processes? Is it meaning-making? Is it generalizability? I know I'm working to make sense of VisionCorps all the time; I'm selecting details and arranging ideas and making connections to others' writings. Is that analysis? Do I have to hold VisionCorps up in comparison to some kind of standard or criteria? But aren't I doing that? I'm comparing

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9Dialogues with Rich Freed, Iowa State University, 1995-
VisionCorps with all I know and have read to make meaning and to persuade my readers of what I think is important for them to understand.

—I talk with my students, all English majors, who have a variety of programmatic emphases, about analysis and about narrative. It becomes the recurrent topic in our class: When are you analyzing? When are you describing? How is rhetorical analysis different from literary analysis? We struggle together.

Later . . .

Professor: "Okay, narrative is easier; you say it's all narrative. Theoretically, in the big sense, we can go with it all being a story. But what of your primary audience? Your committee? What about your academic voice?"

Me: "And my analytical authority?" And I think about the "unruly, unsocialized" theoretician you all have encouraged, and of my interpretations of Bakhtin, Derrida, Foucault, Geertz, Rorty, Nietzsche, and so many others. How then can I write this ethnography in a neutral, controlling, singular, academic voice? Do those whom I admire the most, are their texts neutral? Do they look through and not at their writing? What can I show—not just tell my readers about VisionCorps?

Professor: "Be rhetorical; think of your audience and their expectations."

And his patience endures for yet another conversation.

Later . . .

Me: I know I'm making meaning. How easy do I have to make it appear? How certain of my claims do I need to be? How linear and reductive in the midst of this very tangled meaning-making? Is "analysis" a step above "description" in our academic currency? But I'm not just describing; I am making meaning—selecting

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10See McCloskey, Fisher, Bruner, Czarniawska-Joerges for recent narrative theorizing.
details, juxtposing voices, playing with aspects of chronology. Is interpretation
analysis?

—I talk of narrative and analysis with others: "What do you think? Why
can't I argue with stories? Do they lack "proof"? Or if I tell stories, am I more
difficult to disagree with? With enthymemes, an opponent can knock an assertion
out from under me or disclaim an assumption or display an error in my logical
progression. What is a respondent's tactic against my stories?

And still later. . .

Me: "I think it's a matter of argumentative style and how much I'm willing
to 'let' my readers interpret, and it's about forcing them to realize that they are
interpreting. Maybe it's about how much rhetorical power I'm comfortable with
giving my readers."

Professor: "And will they be willing to work that hard? What expectations
have you set up from the beginning to let them know?"

Me: "Yes, I understand. But don't rhetors have more options than the
traditional 'analytical'?" Do narrative and analysis have to be binary?

Can I be an interpretive ethnographer? Can I raise more questions than I
can answer? Can I complicate my meaning-making, leave gaps, and even
construct loop-holes for readers to wander into and to struggle with? Most of all,
can I satisfy you with my stories?

Because many textual decisions in this writing come down to issues of
analysis and narrative—what they mean and how they relate, these decisions also
reinforce the interdependence of theoretical perspective and stylistic choices—
those writing choices that establish, for example, authorial presence, voice, tone,
and arrangement. Choices mean awareness, decision-making, and control; the following discussion of features offers you a small taste of my narrative decisions.

**Authorial presence. Who and where am I in this ethnography?**

One of the criticisms of realist ethnography is that the ethnographer distances her/himself from the culture studied. Typically, after the arrival scene in realist accounts, the ethnographer assumes a distanced position to the culture, creating an objectifying split from which to write about the facts gleaned in the research. To emphasize to my readers the non-distancing, non-objectifying nature of interpretive ethnography, I, on the other hand, want to be a constant presence in my story of VisionCorps. Beginning with the first word of Chapter 2—my presence is always part of my VisionCorps' story. In contrast, in the two "Theories and Contexts" subsections in Chapter 1, I have created a more distanced, academic presence and only begin to write myself into those subsections in the last pages of each, as I make connections to the scholarly summaries for this ethnography. And in addition to just being a presence throughout, which might then be interpreted as a fly-on-the-wall observer, I am also an interactor with the VisionCorps' cultural members.

**Voice. Whose voice(s) do I make speak and how do I represent them?**

Authorial presence blends into choices about voice as ethnography becomes as much about listening and asking questions as it does about observing. Chapter 1 ended with a forecast of the many voices needed to tell the story of VisionCorps—my voices and the voices of others, which I believe contribute to my voices as I contribute to theirs in a kind of constant interaction. Therefore,

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11Kent and Herndl argue that realist ethnographers distance themselves from the culture to create an effect of objectivity.
because my voice is the result of others' voices, I textualize voices—plural—throughout this ethnography. I want to "write" my theoretical perspective. In Chapter 1, the traces of other interpretive ethnographers and the voices of corporate theorists/consultants are blended to build context for this story, quotations are woven for the flavor of their voices more than for support of my ideas. Overall, I play with writing voices to craft an impact with my readers and wonder at the rhetorical power and implications of this "double voicing."

Tone. What kind of distance do I want to establish between me and my readers, between me and VisionCorps' cultural members—and especially between my readers and VisionCorps' cultural members?

Except for some subtleties, I am basically creating the same tone for all of these relationships. If I could sum it up in a word, I'd suggest that the tone is collegial. Early, realist ethnographic tone was usually patronizing, part of that colonialistic hierarchy that studied the curiosity of the primitives in comparison to the ethnogapher's civilized standards. Later, much realist ethnographic tone idealized the cultures studied, exemplifying these cultures as "unspoiled" and "noble." More recently, ethnographic tone has often become more "scientific," distancing the ethnographer from the culture under investigation and generalizing about the cultures. In choosing to develop a collegial tone, I am focusing on real people as individuals in the culture. In my visual depictions of this tone, I see all of the Being There and the Being Here participants in this story seated at a round table on some comfortable, movable chairs. The participants are sitting next to

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12"Double voicing" is part of Bakhtin's terminology. In The Dialogic Imagination, Michael Holquist explains that although "voice" has "its own timbre and overtones" (434), novels are always double-voiced and, therefore, "dialogized." "Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others... . . This dialogic imperative... insuresthat there can be no actual monologue" (426).
me, elbow to elbow, talking in animated but subdued voices. Significantly, the participants all have faces and voices; the VisionCorps' story emphasizes these people and their interactions, not some faceless corporation.

**Arrangement. How can I most effectively design or write the order of this story?**

Arrangement may be the narrative aspect that most focuses the reader on textualization because I obviously am in control of the chronological development of the VisionCorps' story; of the juxapositioning of description/analysis, musings, and theory throughout for impact and interpretation; and of the non-linear weaving within the chapters and back and forth between the chapters. Although guided rhetorically by my considerations of what my readers need to know when, I am interpreting and playing with the chronology of the VisionCorps' story. Because the component of time is the most salient feature of narrative, flashbacks and temporal interruptions emphasize my telling. Yes, events happened at VisionCorps in a particular order, but my interpretation of those events and my rhetorical purposes shape the order in which I tell them to my readers. Besides my motivation to play with chronology to demonstrate authorial control, I am also emphasizing juxapositioning. Juxtapositioning calls attention to the unusual and is a rhetorical tool for forcing readers to think about things differently or to make unique connections, as do the non-linear development of VisionCorps' story and the tangled nature of my argument with my weavings within chapters and references between.

Textualization is integral to interpretive ethnography. It forces writer and reader to focus on, not through, the writing. Therefore, textualization blurs distinctions of narrative and analysis. In similar ways, projectizing forces people
together in new combinations as teams are aligned and realigned, and it too insists on looking at the process rather than ignoring it.

* * *

Off-handedly, I apologize to Sandy for the mess as we step around the winter litter of twigs and debris on the ramps leading to my deck overlooking the lake. I had turned in my semester grades on Monday and spent the week catching up but had yet to get to the outdoors spring clean-up. It had been a particularly busy week for Sandy at VisionCorps and for me in my multiple locations; we both need to unwind. I chuckle to myself because even in relaxing I know I will be researching—one of the benefits of developing the kind of relationship I have with Sandy. She too knows that I'm always "working." Thurber's quote, "I never know when I'm not writing," seems so appropriate for ethnographic research. Early on, I had worried about "using" our friendship and had discussed often with Sandy the complications of my research, our conversations, and the extension of our relationship beyond VisionCorps. Even though she at times felt an awkwardness and some conflict of interests, she reassured me that she knew what she was doing and saying. We both know that she self-consciously "fed" me what she wanted at times, that I served as a sounding board for her as she talked through her work frustrations (who else has more understanding or more interest?), but, primarily, our conversations evolved, leading to previously unspoken understandings, and benefiting us mutually.

With the evening wind out of the north, my deck, a seemingly protected alcove, is leeward, as is the rest of the shoreline; calm water extends about forty feet out before meeting the insistent gusts. Instead of the undulating slap of waves against the sea wall below, our conversation is accompanied by a gentle
background of infrequent lapping caused by a few early spring boats. The sky deepens as we sip our way into the Michelob lights; we meander through the week's events. The setting helps take the edge off Sandy's consternation over the most recent addition to the documentation team. We've had strains of this conversation for months, sometimes with additions from the other documentation specialist. After a great deal of effort at trying to improve the situation, Sandy has decided that the once affable and supportive—actually fun—team would just never be the same. It would function to accomplish the necessary work and no more. She was giving up on building a more productive relationship with the newly hired documentation specialist. "That's okay. I'm actually okay with the way the team will function; she doesn't get it anyway. But my real concern is that she can't do the work. And I keep trying to figure out if it's the way I give her directions. Every time I check something she's done, she's made more mistakes."

We've tried to analyze these mistakes; at first, in defense of the new writer, I cast my own experiences with the steep learning curve. But it has been months, and she still doesn't get it. When I began in my part-time documentation role, I knew right away that my learning style didn't fit with Sandy's training. She took an inductive approach, parceling out a few details and processes at a time, when I needed to understand the bigger picture and how things fit together. Actually, I needed both at the same time. I had wondered if Sandy was hoarding some of this knowledge and the control/power that goes with it, but decided that mostly she was trying to make the learning as easy as possible and that often she just didn't think about the assumed knowledge that she wasn't sharing. We had talked about my learning style and her training, and I knew that I would have to initiate questions. In fact, that was one of Sandy's most frequent complaints about the
new writer: "She doesn’t ask questions. Am I that intimidating?" I reassured her that she wasn’t, suggesting that a learner has to know enough to even ask the questions.

Once again, Sandy and I talk about the differences between a hierarchy and a "pecking order" in teams, and I summarize Peter’s comments, reinforcing the idea that a pecking order still exists in non-hierarchical groups. It’s about power but also about optimizing valuable experience and abilities for common goals.

"What I appreciate most in all of this is Joel," says Sandy. "He has really come around. He listens... and he understands... and he’s fair. As you know, I’ve decided to make an effort to keep him informed about all of the problems with her, especially her mistakes; I’ve stopped covering for her, at least with our computer engineers. I went into Joel’s office to tell him about an upgrade seminar for our book-building software; it’s free. He thinks we should go [the three documentation specialists]. He said that even if we don’t learn anything about the software, which is my concern, it might be good for us as a team." Her voice, filled with bewilderment, trails off, "So, I guess, I’ll keep trying..."

Our conversation lapses; I’m thinking about Joel and how intimidating he seemed at our first meeting. Perhaps it had been his impatience or his initial uneasiness about my being there. Sandy and I had gone to Ben to sell my research idea. "So you see a change in Joel too? I thought maybe it was just me." I throw out the question, hoping for her analysis.

"You should have known him before; he was really the farmer stuffed into the gray flannel suit. At Parent Corp, all of the managers wore suits. I think that added to his uneasiness, and maybe even to his awkward relationships with the..."
people in development. He has really changed, relaxed in his job. He is so supportive now and easy to talk with."

"H-m-m, and maybe you've helped him figure out how to work with women. He was especially uncomfortable with the few of us."

Sandy laughs, "Maybe, I'd never thought about it really. So often I marvel at how well he facilitates the teams and all of the personalities. He's open to everyone, as fair as can be, and still comes up with ways to get our work done. Not bad."

She asks how my writing is going; although we don't talk about it as often as VisionCorps' events, she's aware of some of my more perplexing writing decisions. As I answer, I think about this ethnographic twist, of the direct influence of my "informant" discussing with me the writing of my ethnography.

The wind has stealthily shifted around to the west, blowing across the deck and chilling our exposed fingers as they curl over the dark, damp bottles. Hours have slipped past, the clanking of the halyards against the masts along the shore has grown increasingly louder and insistent, and, in turn, our voices. The sound reminds me that wind conditions are a constant backdrop in a sailor's life; we're always aware, especially to variations—much like teams to VisionCorps, part of the fabric of their existence. As we head for the house, I marvel at how quickly the lull has dissipated, along with the false sense of quiet.
IV. CREATING SIMULTANEOUS PROCESSES

Ethnography is not really a research method, more of a life attitude, a style of posing questions and being in the mysteries of the world. To 'get' it you have to live it, and there are no fixed rules and your ethnographic heroes can't help you very much. This doesn't surprise—or bother me anymore, but it makes some of my colleagues very nervous when I say it out loud.

H. L. Goodall, Jr.
Casing a Promised Land

If we have shown that the culture and praxis of advanced sciences and technologies do not reduce times to 'time's arrow,' then we have succeeded in calling the common wisdom into question.

Frank Dubinskas

"That's quite a bruise."

"It was a crazy, windy weekend, and in the second race Saturday, our main sheet got looped around a rudder. That's never happened before. In the heat of a windward tacking dual, I crawled out on the stern to untangle the line from around the rudder—I had to lean over the back deck of the boat with the skipper hanging on to my ankle, trusting that his grip was firm. All those unforeseen complications, heightened in the pressures of a fast race, challenge sailors to devise impromptu solutions and make sailing such a compelling adventure."

It's Monday morning in the breakroom, where Paul and I fill our coffee mugs. We're meeting about last-minute release updates and further changes for the documentation of one of his software products. His calm belies the mounting release tensions that permeate the building; it's only 9:00, but employees have been churning away for hours, trying to meet this finally firm deadline. The release date has been pushed back twice in the last six months, but this is it.

Paul leans against the counter and his slow, friendly grin spreads across his face, lighting up his intense, blue eyes set between his shaggy, gray-white eyebrows and beard. He quietly luxuriates amidst the mounting chaos.
His more laid-back approach, Paul explains, is the benefit of his philosophical analysis of the industry and its changes—and his with it. A veteran of the mainframe computer industry who has worked for several corporations and the government throughout the world, developing specialized software and processes for information management, Paul joined VisionCorps immediately after the spin off. Actually, when the spin off occurred, Paul was a Parent Corp employee, working on-site at this location but not as part of the division. He soon joined the new corporation, bringing his software products with him since he was the only person who could support them or continue their development. Now his concepts are being integrated with other VisionCorps' products, and new VisionCorps' developments are also being introduced into Paul's products. I've been fortunate to be able to work with Paul on the documentation for his products, but it hasn't been easy. For example, in the documentation we're currently updating, my biggest challenge is to continually explain to the users that the manual can't be a step-by-step tutorial, that we are only trying to explain the concept and process and to provide some examples; users have to develop their own "intuitive abilities" based on their specific work environments and needs. Paul feels a responsibility toward the users of his software product—mainly, to provide all the help we can and also to avoid liabilities. He urges me to "qualify, qualify, make sure they understand how difficult and intuitive the process is; it sure isn't for beginners."

But now, I adjust to his pace, sliding onto the table across from him as we chuckle at the size of the bruise on my leg. This chat isn't our first about sailing. He comes to the sport with all the enthusiasm of the newly hooked, and I as a devotee. We share experiences of racing scows in winds of almost 30 knots—like
the past weekend—when raising the spinnaker (the large, billowing sail used for additional power in sailing across and downwind) is an impossibility, when the skipper's words "hike 'er down" mean tighten your grip on the sheets, strain out in the hiking straps, and hope for survival as you sail across the wind, spray pummeling your body, drowning out any words of encouragement between the crew. We share those moments of unmatched exhilaration. The in-the-moment thrill. The speed. The sense of accomplishment in just finishing a race.

Other employees, who might have joined our conversation on other days, dart through the breakroom, heading upstairs or down the hallway for hurried discussions. For VisionCorps, as releases begin to overlap and the pressures of market competition grow ever more intense, the pace intensifies with little let up in the wind.

We refill our mugs and head up the back stairway. As we wander the narrow pathways to his cube, we begin our discussion of the status of the current product release and its documentation. Less than two weeks away from our final cut-off date, I think our conversation is just a final check before running the camera-ready-copy; my remaining days are scheduled for another product and another software development team. The product we're discussing has already been through two technical reviews for both the product and its documentation, and the manual through another documentation editing cycle.

Paul begins preparing me for his latest development: "I got a call from a customer in England last week; they're big and we've been working pretty hard to hang on to them."

I nod, acknowledging that I know the organization.
"They've been pushing for a new feature, one which I'd figured out a while back but hadn't gotten into the product yet. I just finished writing the code; it's in now."

"Paul," I say, my voice tensing as I mentally review my schedule, trying to squeeze in more hours, "we're only two weeks out. How extensive are the documentation changes going to need to be?"

"Don't get excited. You can just make these doc changes for the next release; that one's already in the works too. You've probably already inputted time and page estimates in the Product Development Plan. We'll just make those adjustments to that online scheduler, and then when we start revising the documentation for the next release, this new feature will already be in the product."

"But if the changes amount to more than a fourth of the existing documentation, we do a whole new manual instead of an update package; users are confused by too many page changes. What do you think we're talking here?"

"Oh, I guess it'll probably be long enough for a new manual; you're always aware of more pages and sections that are implicated in changes than I am."

"But what happens to our customers who get this software and the unmatched documentation at this release? How confused will they be?"

"Not very. Probably not at all. Actually, if they don't know the new feature is in there, they probably won't notice at all." Paul laughs, "Guess we need to start making online Read Me files for update packages. At the pace the industry and our competition's moving, we've got to figure out some ways to shorten the process, more ways to collapse development and documentation and to respond to our customers even faster. It's going that way; we've got to figure out how to deal
with Parent Corp's archaic demands—like for all these long review cycles. You've
heard me complain often enough about needing to respond more directly to our
customers, of needing to get away from all of Parent Corp's layers that make it
harder for me to help my customers with fixes or to add new features they have to
have to do their work. We're getting there. We're moving to a more fluid
environment all the time."

We discuss the customers and their actual use of the manual. It's not the
first time; the customer is usually the subject of our analyses and decisions—as
much Paul's focus as mine. Finally, I glance at my watch, "Okay, you've
convinced me; it's the only practical way to go. I'll just turn my head on these new
features; it's not like we're promising them something they aren't getting." After
years of working with Paul, I respect his judgment and trust that he wants what's
best for the customers as much, even more, than I do.

Sandy, the senior documentation specialist, appears at the entrance of
Paul's cube, "What's up? Did I hear something about this release's update
package?"

We hurry through an explanation.

"It's not what I would do. I always document the product, as is. But I guess
this is your decision; you're in a bind. You two know your schedules and the
product. I can't talk any more now, or I'll be here all night."

Moving from Hierarchy: Simultaneity

From my externalist perspective, time is a social construct, triangulated in
indefinite and interdependent interactions with others and the world. Our
perceptions and use of time, therefore, involve issues of change, of ordering
processes and work, and of efficiency. Time, in all these implications, is
dominating in new ways the lives of VisionCorps' owners and employees. Pressures from niche marketing, more direct customer demands, continual technological updates, and the constant development of replacement products insistently foreground time and the problems of having no time. In his collection *Making Time: Ethnographies of High-Technology Organizations*, Dubinskas argues that time is constructed and that "alternative, multiple views of time" (9) exist within cultures and, at the same time, span geographic cultures to link professional cultures. In other words, scientists located around the world who work in a high-tech field may have a more similar perspective of time than a scientist might share with people in her/his same geographic organization. Dubinskas' ethnography and those of other writers in this volume suggest that not only is Western culture diverse in its construction of time but that within corporate cultures the diversity of ways people view time creates many subcultures (11). "In speaking of times, we are never talking about a single universal entity, concept, or system; and one of the fundamental conclusions from our studies is that no one group or culture has a monopoly on the definition of time. Yet all these times have a 'family resemblance' as important symbolic nexes around which coalesce issues of order, power, self-definition, and knowledge" (3). Dubinskas emphasizes "the contrasting times of different communities or groups working in the same organization or around the same technology. In these organizations, time is often an articulation point, mediator, or bone of contention between the professional groups" (4).

VisionCorps' cultural members are negotiating many conflicts caused by changing perspectives of time: in the international high-tech business environment, among their many kinds of teams, and between individuals with
different exigencies. Pressures exacerbated by lack of time are making the lives of VisionCorps' owners and employees more complex and are heightening rhetorical demands. From a social perspective or an interpretive perspective, corporations have always been rhetorical. However, when perspectives and contexts change, interactional and rhetorical needs and demands are altered in response to those changes. In rhetorical corporations, where the aim is not to enforce the static and controllable but to encourage change and ventures into the unknown, rhetorical demands are not only different and greater on more employees at all times, the disorder and reconsiderations of time make rhetorical effectiveness even more difficult. More than just time is sped up; in response to that increase, the "natural," sequential, progressive order of work is changing.

For VisionCorps' owners and employees, traditional time—as "a fundamental symbolic category that we use for talking about the orderliness of social life" (Dubinskas 13)—is becoming increasingly disorderly in the sense that the linear, progressive, sequential structures of work are colliding with a collapsed version of work that demands simultaneous actions.\(^1\) Dubinskas reminds us that artifacts of time reinforce cultural perspectives, that "time appears to impose a structure of work days, calendars, careers, and life-cycles that we learn and live in as part of our cultures. This temporal order has an 'already-made' character of naturalness to it, a model of the way things are" (13). Value and power laden, these physical reinforcers for the ordering of time include "calendars and business plans, career cycles and research protocols" (15). Traditionally (i.e., as in the traditions imposed by Parent Corp) these artifacts of time have included

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\(^1\)The actions are demanded, according to Davidow and Malone, because "the closer a corporation gets to cost-effective instantaneous production of mass-customized goods and services, the more competitive and successful it will be" (5). "The ideal virtual product or service" of such a corporation is "produced instantaneously and customized in response to customer demand" (4).
communications such as hard-copy product development plans and hard-copy
documentation travelers (covering pages that order and track documentation
cycles and travel with the hard-copy versions of documentation). Now, in addition
to or instead of these hard-copy, fixed artifacts, VisionCorps' owners and
employees are designing new communication forms and practices in response to
new time perspectives. They are creating a new kind of corporate order through
their communication, and their challenge includes rethinking the meaning of order
and inventing ways to order and to manage while they promote disorder and
change. For VisionCorps' owners and employees, time can no longer be "reduced
to a 'timeless' dimensionality, a mere 'shadow cast by social action'"; a reduction
that as Dubinskas explains, "is partly born of the social need to control
complexity, as well as activity, particularly with the rise of European and North
American industrial capitalism" (8). The following subsections describe changes in
VisionCorps' communication that result when owners and employees are
challenged by time and order, and respond with increasingly simultaneous actions.

**Integrating and Varying Production Management**

The ordering of time and work is more fluid because of sophisticated, online
production management programs that integrate projects, allowing for and
encouraging timely variations and simultaneous actions.

Professional communicators are accustomed to creating and using
relatively fixed, Gantt chart-type tools (also artifacts of time) for coordinating and
driving large projects. These charts allow their users to see progress achieved and
to track different segments of projects, especially those divided among several
employees or teams. The charts persuade teams that progress is being made,
motivate them to continue, and order the process. Often these progress charts
suggest and provide a sequential and permanent record of production that is more clearly ordered or "progressive" than the actual project. Deadlines are missed and adjusted, and projects hit snags and are sometimes stalled. However, these communication tools or charts provide a visual metaphor for the sequencing of corporate time and work order. VisionCorps' spin off legacy from Parent Corp includes Gantt-type charts: specifically, hard-copy product development plans and hard-copy documentation travelers. Although those documents are still part of work functions, increasingly they conflict with newly developing online visualizations of VisionCorps' ordering of work and time—virtual Gantt charts.

VisionCorps' owners and employees are developing and implementing two custom-designed and integrated software programs for coordinating the corporation's own work: ASAP and Master Software Development Schedules. Like more traditional Gantt charts, these online documents coordinate and measure work, and they are date and deadline driven. But they have a somewhat different influence on VisionCorps' employees because of their fluid appearance and use. The visual message of Gantt charts is progress; the visual message of these online schedulers is interdependency, flux, and indeterminacy.

ASAP replaces more traditional corporate reporting formats for gathering corporate facts and passing the information up to the decision-makers. It is an ongoing account of the corporation, fully accessible to all employees at all times, completely integrated, and employee-dependent. ASAP looks like a web of interrelated activities or, perhaps, a picture of a big juggling act. Each week employees update their activities in the database, activating cells in which to record their time spent on specific projects and tasks. The projects and tasks—originally entered by each individual employee—connect with those of other
employees. Cells fade to gray when tasks reach 100 Percent Achieved, and as part of an ongoing process, new cells for new projects are added as completed ones eventually disappear. Other accounting and assessing functions are integrated with ASAP so that, for example, the total hours spent on each project and the kinds of development hours can be easily determined at any time. Even more significant, ASAP has writing spaces in addition to the spaces for recording amounts of time and efforts: Employees can add a narrative account of their work week. Because everyone knows that readers of these narratives or comments could be anyone in the corporation, the writing spaces are usually used rhetorically to thank peers for helpful contributions, to emphasize the writer's own efforts, to explain problems or complications, and/or to prompt other employees about shared projects and deadlines. Adept users of ASAP, therefore, are able to communicate to build support for and rapport about their work and to solve problems.

Master Software Development Schedules are integrated with ASAP and dependent on the same Start and End Dates and the Percent Achieved, To Go Effort, and Total Effort for projects and tasks. This same information, entered by each project member, is reconfigured to focus on development features and projects and their relationships. Actually, this online chart is the originating source of tasks and dates. The scheduler was developed to help Release Teams, cross-functional teams who negotiate software features to be included in various releases and then coordinate team members' efforts. Release Team membership comprises software development, including documentation, distribution, and marketing; the actual composition shifts as individuals join and leave the team, especially as their expertise is needed for decision-making about specific projects.
Although only one of these teams and schedules exists at a time, Release Teams and Master Software Development Schedules are ongoing and changing. The team members negotiate the features that need to be added to existing products for product releases, determine needs for new products or "rebundling" of product features, and then strategize about how and by whom the work will be accomplished.

The Release Teams attempt to respond to customers quickly and directly; the teams aim to produce competitive, marketable products. To accomplish this goal, the development schedule is as open as possible so that changes and fine-tuning can be incorporated into the products for as much of the development cycle as possible. That openness and interactivity are especially apparent in the Master Software Development Schedules, which facilitate the computer engineers' need to work simultaneously and to code until the last moment. The scheduler helps everyone involved in a release to understand at each moment the status of each person in the project. It specifies individual accountability and demands commitment.

Driven by their perceived needs for fluid, interdependent, simultaneous, and faster development processes, VisionCorps' owners and employees have developed in-house software that makes more possible these requirements for new timing and ordering of corporate work. The development and continued maintenance of these online, open processes/documents requires complex rhetorical considerations of numerous and interactively involved stakeholders.
Maintaining Open Documents

Rather than perceiving work as progressive, determinant accomplishments and "finished" documents, employees' jobs depend on maintaining open work processes and documents.

Although the previous subsection focused on the fluid and interdependent nature of production and therefore employees' work time—technologically organized by ASAP and Master Software Development Schedules—it too was about open and living documents and the way that time and order are perceived and negotiated differently than in a more fixed and sequential environment. In Chapter 3, the Process Review presentations and their follow-up, online representations are also examples of living documents because they are revised and added to for subsequent team reviews. And at the beginning of this chapter when Paul and I negotiate the update release documentation for one of his software products, our discussion emphasizes the unfinished nature of the majority of VisionCorps' documents and the perception and document management that supports this perspective.

Paul's and my discussion also described the conflict between different perspectives of ordering and timing—an open-ended, in-flux perception and a more closed, rigid perception. Primarily because of the pace of development cycles and demands of niche marketing, Paul and I agree about maintaining open documentation production for his software products. However, VisionCorps' employees approach document openness in different ways. For example, Sandy, as you read, insists on documenting products exactly as they exist. She also describes, in her product documentation, software screens exactly as they appear to the users, even if the screens include inconsistencies with other screens. As an
alternative, some documentation specialists try to negotiate with computer
engineers about recoding to improve consistency within the software and
correspondingly in the documentation. For computer engineers and
documentation specialists, decisions about open, living documents depend on the
give and take of their work together and on their support for each other's work
styles; ideally they are able to compromise and accommodate the tempo and
demands of the development process.

Problems arise, however, when openness is not accommodated, when time
and order are perceived as more determined and sequential. At the end of Chapter
3, you read about Sandy's frustrations with a newly hired documentation
specialist. Sandy's frustrations stem in part from the new person's inability to
adjust to VisionCorps' need for open documentation. Sandy tried to convey the
importance of open documentation production for facilitating constant additions to
and changes of drafts—of a number of products at the same time—without
producing final CRC copies until the final, hard, deliverable date. Because of this
timing and ordering, the computer engineers are able to make as many changes
and coding additions as they have time for, until the last minute. The new
documentation specialist insisted on producing CRC copy early in release cycles,
and then later she would have to reproduce corrected versions. She even tried to
refuse computer engineers' additions or changes because she had already produced
the CRC copy. She never learned to support the fluid development process by
juggling numerous, open documents at the same time.

To help juggle their documentation schedules and also as a safeguard
against a member's absence, the documentation team developed a "living"
Document Plan. The Document Plan is developed and maintained online for each
Copied from a frequently revised online template, the Document Plan prompts the documentation specialists to answer a series of basic questions about the document. These questions provide helpful consistency for handing-off the document between documentation specialists and/or for the development of additional levels of the manual. Typically, documentation specialists customize the Document Plan to make it most helpful for them, yet still valuable to others. Document Plans are usually started with the pre-planning of the manual, revised during the writing of the manual, and added to after CRC manual copies are mailed. Some of the most helpful questions in the Document Plan point to the next round of updates or manual revisions by asking for suggestions relevant to the next release.

VisionCorps' important documents are open, even though they are occasionally printed and distributed in hard-copy format. As such, they represent the owners' and employees' adjustments for simultaneity and flux. However, because computer engineers need time to code until the last minute and because documentation specialists even then need time to produce manuals, conflicts are inherent in these timing disparities. VisionCorps' development schedules depend on employee sensitivity toward others' time constraints and effective interpersonal negotiations.

Creating New Communication Formats and Purposes

In addition to traditional formats and traditional purposes, VisionCorps' employees are creating new professional communication formats and/or using existing formats for different and expanded purposes.

In this chapter, I have been describing many VisionCorps' documents, most of which are non-traditional in comparison to formats usually included in
professional communication textbooks. No traditional reports are included; process documents drive VisionCorps. These continually evolving process documents are written as tools for a corporate-wide audience of peers, including those fuzzy corporate extensions described in Chapter 2, and for the writer(s) of the documents. To manage the business and development of the corporation, these process documents depend on online technology that promotes integration and simultaneous processes. Additionally, VisionCorps' marketing representatives use traditional documents in new ways.

When I first realized that the marketing representatives employ the user documentation to sell software products, I speculated that VisionCorps, as a new company, lacked more traditional marketing materials. Although it may have been initiated because of this void, the selling technique is continuing, even with the addition of other marketing documents such as product descriptions and portfolios. The use of product documentation as selling tools has two significant ramifications, especially for the documentation specialists.

First, documentation specialists work in a more critical timeframe and are pressured by marketing representatives, in particular, to produce documentation ahead of a product's development deadline. In other words, rather than producing documentation on schedule with a product's release, the documentation is needed, at least in some draft form, sometime during the development process. In VisionCorps' environment of approximately 50 employees, the marketing representatives know who writes what documentation and where that writer can be found; to acquire the latest manuals for visits to potential customer sites, marketing representatives often pressure documentation specialists for advance copies of documentation. Besides the added time pressure, documentation
specialists often are required to determine how "ready" the documentation and the product itself are for promotion to customers. In addition to problems caused when multiple documentation drafts circulate among users, documentation specialists are forced to consider ethical issues of "in-the-works" products that may not perform as anticipated and legal responsibilities. More than ever before, documentation specialists are wedged between marketing representatives, eager to sell a new product or feature and less-than-cautious about potential problems or the inability to deliver the proposed product, and computer engineers, under their own pressures to produce in response to what they grudgingly feel are the demands of Marketing.

Although documentation specialists experience additional pressures when product documentation is used as a marketing tool, a second ramification is more positive. Because of these demands for and new uses of product documentation, documentation specialists have a new kind of power. When I began my research at VisionCorps, one of my frequently posed questions to all employees—but especially to computer engineers was—"How do your customers use the product documentation?" And the most frequent response was, "They don't. Customers have to have it, but they usually never open the manuals. They just add ours to others, collecting dust on their shelves."

Because computer engineers and most employees have perceived product documentation as relatively useless and valueless, documentation specialists were considered mainly an annoyance, requiring too much valuable end-time in the development process. However, as employees recognize the selling power of product documentation, especially as non-Parent Corp software products are designed, documentation specialists' work is valued for its additional purposes.
VisionCorps does not have a protective layer of management that buffers marketing representatives, computer engineers, or documentation specialists from communicating and negotiating with each other about their time-driven processes. The marketing representative must sell the documentation specialist on the idea of turning over a manual. The software engineer must convince the documentation specialist of the product's readiness. And often the documentation specialist must raise cautions and argue issues of standards with both the marketing representative and the software engineer. Because of increased competition for customers, which generally translates into a race for the latest product features and because of their team-based management, employees in this rhetorical corporation are forced to negotiate with each other to speed up the development process and corporate time; as a result, they are creating new documents and devising new document uses.

**Changing Concepts of Efficiency**

In response to increased time demands, the "natural," sequential, progressive order of work is changing, and with it concepts of efficiency.

VisionCorps' owners and employees are able to manage their schedules and time demands because of the structure (or non-structure) of their team-based corporation. In the "Purpose Statement" of their *Strategy Document* (one of those open, continuously drafted documents described in previous subsections), the Strategic Planning Team prioritizes five objectives for the corporation. The first objective, which follows, is significant because it connects VisionCorps' team-based management approach to faster development processes and to their brand of efficiency:
Objectives

1. Promote quality and excellence in all aspects of our company.

VisionCorps has minimal wasteful bureaucracy and procedures. These relics were the first things to go when we left Parent Corp. This is good, but we must not overcompensate for the painfully inefficient processes we had to use as part of the larger corporation. We should only throw out the inefficient and unnecessary procedures and keep what was good. . . .

Although development processes are now left entirely up to individual teams, it is still more efficient to design before coding, to review designs before coding, and to review code before testing. It is still better to prototype a GUI before designing the underlying product. . . .

Remember how we used to laugh when Parent Corp's management claimed that quality came first, but then only seemed interested in our schedules? [This last sentence was eliminated with this draft but served its purpose of emphasizing differences between VisionCorps and Parent Corp, and for rallying support for their new management approach.]

1.1 Maximize efficiency

1.2 Minimize the bureaucracy

1.3 Create self-managed teams

Continuing with additional, specific and proprietary points, their list explains how VisionCorps' owners and employees can achieve corporate quality and excellence. In particular, these first three points along with the preceding text reinforce VisionCorps' commitment to non-bureaucratic efficiency. Clearly, VisionCorps' owners and employees are primarily motivated to eliminate the wastefulness and inefficiency they experienced as part of the large, hierarchical corporation.
VisionCorps' owners and employees believe the alternative to hierarchy is the efficiency and speed of self-managed teams.

Although the owners and employees are mostly in agreement with the *Strategy Document* and are committed to making their self-managed teams work, they are finding that, while eliminating hierarchy brings them into closer contact with customers, they are still frustrated by time demands—according to many of the employees, even more so. Some employees attribute their overly tight schedules and heavy workloads to the corporation's newness and its overly opportunistic approach to business that causes them to hopelessly pursue too many customer leads. Others suggest that the multitude of teams and team meetings requires too much time away from "real" work, coding or writing manuals. In particular, many employees are frustrated when essential team members do not attend meetings or when they walk out of meetings because they think their time is being wasted. Additionally, employees explain that they are just doing more than they did before; they have additional responsibilities and new job demands. Joel tries to counter these complaints by repeating, often, that "it's just the nature of our work."

**What's So Wrong with Efficiency?**

The number one goal of VisionCorps' owners and employees is to "maximize efficiency." They have eliminated layers of wasteful and frustrating bureaucracy, and they are trying to break down boundaries of functional divisions that separate work into artificial sequences and employees from each other and each other's expertise. For VisionCorps' owners and employees, efficiency represents an ideal work situation in which all employees negotiate the direction of the corporation and their immediate tasks and work processes. Because of communication tools
such as ASAP and Master Software Development Schedules, employees have a sense of control and, therefore, greater efficiency. VisionCorps' owners' and employees' goal of efficiency is much different from the efficiency of Parent Corp. In simplified terms, in Parent Corp, efficiency is about maintaining the organization and all its layers; to VisionCorps' owners and employees, efficiency is personal and directly connected to their work satisfaction.

Efficiency is also a concern for professional communication practitioners and teachers. Scholars such as Miller and Katz have questioned traditional assumptions about teaching professional communication as communication efficiency. They raise issues about what professional communication teachers are actually teaching and suggest that "we ought not, in other words, simply design our courses and curricula to replicate existing practices, taking them for granted and seeking to make them more efficient in their own terms, making our students 'more valuable to industry'; we ought instead to question those practices and encourage our students to do so too" (23). These scholars have greatly broadened the scope of professional communication, especially to encompass "our responsibility for political and economic conduct" (Miller 24). Miller argues for "both competence and critical awareness of the implications of competence..." and ". . .the ability (and willingness) to take socially responsible action, including symbolic action" (23). From his analysis of "efficient" Nazi technical communication, Katz also dramatically argues the need to teach beyond efficiency. Both Miller and Katz use efficiency to illustrate the dangers of a pedagogy that reinforces a practical approach to communication that unquestioningly supports systems or corporations.
While I agree with Miller's and Katz's concern for "unquestioning" acceptance of communication practices in use and for the ethical impoverishment that results from this pedagogy, I caution against setting up efficiency as a strawman. Interpretations of efficiency are not universal or necessarily connected to modernist assumptions about corporations. In other words, it's just too easy to give efficiency such a bad rap. Although the systems enabled by efficiency may be unethical and while an unquestioning drive for efficiency can result in ethical blindness, efficiency in itself isn't evil. Efficiency isn't only connected to modernist ideals of a non-human, machine-like corporation; it isn't limited as Miller says to "getting things done, with efficient and effective action" (14). Efficiency can also be a factor in a humanistic approach to work.

After VisionCorps' spin off, the documentation specialists continued to use the book-building software that had been developed exclusively for Parent Corp's manuals. Maintaining the existing documentation databases for the software products seemed like the most efficient decision. However, the documentation specialists increasingly complained about the antiquated book-building software, especially its inability to integrate graphics electronically. Documentation specialists had literally to cut and paste—with blades, pica rulers, and rubber cement—graphics into the text of CRC manuals. They were frustrated by the time and inaccuracy of the process but also by the demeaning nature of this primitive method of producing documentation in a high-tech environment. The old software was professionally stifling.

Although the literal cut-and-paste process had almost no effect on the rest of the corporation—on the work of the computer engineers or the marketing representatives—upgrading the book-building equipment became a corporate
priority. Joel commented often and vigorously that he was "actually pained" when he saw documentation specialists cutting and pasting the old fashioned way. Many employees supported any change that moved VisionCorps further away from the influence of Parent Corps. And others took pride in a cutting-edge technology for all facets of the corporation. Although upgrading the book-building software would save some dollars from employee time wasted on the old process, those savings would not begin to equal the amounts of the material investment or the down-time for the documentation specialists to learn the new software or to convert the existing manuals. It was not a cost-efficient decision, but one that VisionCorps made. For VisionCorps' owners and employees, efficiency means more than making the corporation "run" smoothly to maximize profits; their efficiency focuses on employees' work and optimizing employees' professional capabilities and fulfillment. While they believe this approach will ultimately equate to a more successful and profitable corporation, VisionCorps' owners and employees believe corporate efficiency depends first on the employees.

Interpretations of corporate efficiency indicate differences in theoretical and methodological perspectives between a critical approach and an interpretive approach. Czarniawska-Joerges summarizes these different approaches in relation to the field of organizational studies:

organizational theory was born out of a pragmatic wish to establish conditions for the successful functioning of organizations in order to improve existing ones. This hardly intellectual aim has undergone a series of dramatic changes in the course of its development. Although the mainstream still follows the functionalist approach, at least two new trends have emerged: critical and interpretive. Critical organization theories aim at disclosing organizational deceptions in defense of the people in organizations—who are there for their own interests, not for organizational survival. The interpretive approaches share the humanistic ideals of the critical approach (organizations for people, not people for organizations),
but do not assume any a priori evaluations of a given organizational reality. Instead a milder assumption is posited: People not only are in organizations (which both functionalists and critical theorists assume), but they also create organizations. Consequently, the increased understanding of organizational phenomena should enable people to create more benevolent organizations and to fight against nonbenevolent ones. (11)

The belief that people create organizations or corporations seems especially appropriate for understanding VisionCorps and rhetorical corporations. The efficiency of VisionCorps' cultural members focuses on improving the work lives of employees through self-managed teams and implicitly requires active employee questioning, involvement, and responsibility. Much of the employees' questioning is about demands on their resources, corporate and personal, and the best possible use of their time and efforts, especially in their frantically-paced environment. Because VisionCorps' employees do question, the corporate atmosphere is often uneasy and somewhat combative. Not all of the employees tolerate or flourish in such an atmosphere where individuals need to stand up for their ideas and to present them persuasively for the consideration of others; some are bruised in the process.

**Struggling with the Ethics of Being Here and There**

In this chapter, I'm foregrounding ethics, not because it doesn't belong in the others; of course, it's there too. But here as I write about the increased pressures of niche marketing and technological innovations that speed work and information management, I also need to discuss the ways that ethical issues are heightened and standards are reevaluated. VisionCorps' owners and employees are questioning fundamental work processes. What worked in the past as sequential, now doesn't; it isn't fast enough. Many of VisionCorps' owners and employees believe they need simultaneous processes. And although VisionCorps
is constantly experimenting to develop changes in its production processes, employees are caught in a bind that requires more and more in much less time but in most of the same old ways. The pressure is building, and owners and employees are questioning corporate norms and raising ethical questions:

- about the number of opportunities their relatively fixed number of employees pursue
- about endless cycles of updates or upgrades built continuously into products
- about the limits of work and no time
- about the "price" employees pay for their jobs

From a corporate perspective, owners and employees are asking how they can cope with these sped-up time demands, and how or if they can persuade or reward employees for working with these pressures.

Perspectives of VisionCorps' cultural members are changing in response to sped-up time, flux, and immediacy; their ethical awareness is heightened as a result. Similarly, perspectives of interpretive ethnographers are changing, and they too are more ethically aware. This analogy is based on similar changes away from a transcendent other that previously set the standards or codes of behavior. For VisionCorps cultural members, that transcendent other was the modernist corporate hierarchy of Parent Corp and the management decision-makers at the top of the hierarchy. For interpretive ethnographers, that transcendent other was the master narrative of objectivity. Because VisionCorps' cultural members and interpretive ethnographers are no longer guided (or constrained) by "natural," "pre-existing" standards that exist foundationally and separately from themselves, ethics is key.
Although this ethical awareness has probably been apparent to readers in previous chapters since it permeates my discussions, ethical considerations are further heightened or complicated by the immediacy of sped-up time and the immediacy of fieldwork exigencies. VisionCorps' cultural members, like the crews of a racing scow, are responsible for the quick decision-making that keeps the boat upright and in the competition, without their decisions being ratified by the bosses or the skipper. Interpretive ethnographers work with the same immediacy; they have no illusions nor standards of scientific objectivity. And with their focus on interpreting local contexts, they cannot rely on generalized ethnographic models to affirm their decisions.

Because they know that what they do is interpret cultures not discover or hypothesis-test, interpretive ethnographers are aware that they cannot be "objective" observers of a culture. Their presence always has an affect on the culture studied. Rather, ethical issues become ethnographers' primary concern. Have ethnographers always been ethically implicated in their research culture? Yes. But they haven't always had to be aware of their involvement, especially when their concern instead was for objectivity. The shift of knowing—to "social theory," to "interpretive theory," to "rhetorical theory"—foregrounds ethical awareness in ethnography.

The ethical issues of VisionCorps' employees and owners are big, as big as human concerns about pressures and purposes of work, and the impact on families and even lives. I approach these big issues from the very local, from the stories of individuals and the ways they work and communicate. Although these small stories are primarily local, they are part of bigger contexts; they are both shaped by and shape those contexts. While I interact with VisionCorps' cultural
members and share their ethical concerns, I also add to their culture the additional ethical issues of my research.

We discussed their and my concerns often. At the end of the previous chapter, you read about the way Sandy and I negotiated continuously, throughout the more than three years of my fieldwork, our relationship and her tellings and my askings. On a more practical level, I made daily decisions about what documents and e-mail I would copy, always checking for permission. I often reminded employees of my researcher status, either overtly or with my notetaking. And often employees would hesitate in mid-sentence, wondering if they should be so candid. My reply was that there was no "off the record"; I wanted them to be aware of my research status. Early on, employees occasionally worried that they might be "invalidating" my research methodology in some way by telling me so much; however, they soon understood that our interaction was exactly what my research depended on. Occasionally, employees would even intentionally stage their discussions in my presence because they thought I should hear what they were saying. They stopped hesitating about asking my opinion or about gaining my involvement in projects for fear that they would impinge on my research methodology. They came to trust my ethical judgment, especially my respect for them and for their livelihood. Although this level of trust was rewarding, I felt even more aware of my responsibilities toward them, responsibilities that were sometimes conflicting. An umbrella commitment to do no harm to the culture, although helpful, often didn't guide me in situations when individuals were in conflict or when an individual seemed to be in conflict with the well-being of the corporation (or to the collective well-being of the employees).²

²I have been guided in answering ethical questions by the "Statement of Professional Responsibilities" of the Society for Applied Anthropologists. The bottom line in this code of
In all of my ethical dilemmas, however, I have neither Latours' cavalier stance toward his informants nor Blyler and Thralls' concern that ethnographic studies of corporate communication are potentially difficult from a critical perspective. As part of a speaking tour in the fall of 1994, Latour spoke to a graduate student seminar on rhetoric and invited guests; the majority of questions asked of him focused on ethical issues and on Latour's lack of compunction. His response hinged on what he explained as deep cultural differences between a French theoretical perspective and an American perspective. He believes that no separation exists between his subjects, typically scientists, and himself or anyone else; therefore, he has no ethical responsibility toward the people he studies. And in a more pragmatic vein, he suggests, "There are many more I can study. I have a very thick phone book." Primarily, he believes that his "informants" deserve the kind of close scrutiny and analysis he brings to his studies of them. He doesn't worry about the effects his studies may have on them or their work.

Latour's "research-subject beware" approach is an example of the concern Blyler and Thralls express about the difficulties of critical research in professional communication that depends on corporate collaboration. In particular, they suggest that workplace studies may be incompatible with an ideological perspective or critique. Although I agree that an ideological perspective that

ethics, which reflects the efforts of thousands of anthropologists over the last forty years, pledges that researchers will cause no harm to the informants or to the cultures studied.

3Latour spoke at the University of Iowa on 17 October 1994, for a program sponsored by the Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry (POROI).

4In their introductory chapter of Professional Communication: The Social Perspective, Blyler and Thralls describe three research perspectives in professional communication and then assess these perspectives' implications for research and teaching. While they explain workplace ethnographies as compatible with a social constructionist approach, they believe this kind of research, as currently configured in professional communication, may be incompatible with an ideological or paralogic hermeneutic approach because of conflicting purposes.
depends on preconceived, unchanging absolutes would make workplace studies difficult, the issue, as Blyler and Thralls would agree, is more complex. First, if researchers work from a "postmodern" perspective, they believe in *petits recits* rather than totalizing epistemologies. Additionally, when researchers believe that there are no absolute norms, they interpret cultures as sites of change or potential change. Both of these perspectives allow workplace research within a dynamics of tolerance. By that I mean that the researcher is open to learning about the culture, to listening, interacting, and building understanding along with the cultural members. A dynamics of tolerance does not mean that the researcher is without beliefs, values, or a critical perspective. Rather, I believe as Goodall does: "I have learned that my position in the narrative arena is inherently a political one, and that every act I undertake as a teacher, writer, speaker, or researcher is either complicit with the status quo or engaged in the struggle to change it" (*Casing* 185). I clearly put my emphasis on change and believe in a *status quo* of change. As I interpret Goodall, as I want him to be, his statement means ethnographers are never neutral, never objective, that all their actions have an affect on the culture. Therefore, interpretive ethnographers always balance tensions. These tensions result from the beliefs they bring to their research, the tolerance that prompts them to interact with "others"—an "ununified others," and an ever-present potential for change.

When I made the decision to work part-time for VisionCorps concurrent with my fieldwork, I knew I was increasing the number of potential ethical dilemmas. These dilemmas didn't depend on less "objectivity," but on greater acceptance and involvement. The two following examples suggest questions that

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5In *The Clinical Perspective in Fieldwork*, Schein warns researchers that surveying and interviewing have the potential for harm: "Ethnographers are likely to be thrust increasingly into
interpretive ethnographers ask themselves almost daily. Dilemmas like these aren't always large-scale or far reaching, but they affect the ethnographer's research and often the culture. These examples involve two forms of VisionCorps' communication: a corporate newsletter addressed to customers and a highly proprietary strategic planning document.

Within weeks of VisionCorps' beginnings, the owners hired a local advertising agency to design an ad campaign to announce their existence, to reassure customers that the software products would still be supported, to explain their relationship to Parent Corps, and to attract new customers. After VisionCorps spent a great deal of money and time, the agency introduced a less-than-mediocre campaign; a failure, we all agreed. The agency didn't understand the capacity management software industry, let alone VisionCorps. Posters of the campaign were hung in the upstairs entry area and employees passed them making snide comments or grumbling about the waste. They were concerned with their image and the industry's reaction to the ad campaign. Of all the employees, Russ was the most vocal in his disapproval. One of the veteran computer engineers who was valued for his creative flair and sense of humor, he had many ideas for doing it better.

Within a few weeks he attended a marketing publications seminar, wrote and presented a proposal to become the VisionCorps' advertising director, and was launched in his new career. Somewhat overwhelmed by the sudden changes he had wrought, he shrugged laughingly and explained that he just didn't think he could do any worse. And he asked if he could rely on me and the other

clinical roles as they come to be taken for granted and build up trust" (24). "Usuly such methods simply assume incorrectly that one can obtain data without influencing and/or disturbing the system. . . .this represents a degree of irresponsibility that needs to be addressed explicitly" (63).
documentation specialists, especially at first. In addition to a new ad campaign, he decided that VisionCorps needed a corporate newsletter for their customers. He believed that a newsletter would help current customers realize the existence of the new corporation and define VisionCorps' relationship to Parent Corp. We talked often about features to include, page design, and especially audience analysis. Many of his questions resulted from a corporate newsletter workshop he had attended. He wanted, and received from me, reassurance that he didn't have to follow the workshop's "rules," especially when they didn't provide the best solutions to his design problems.

I found a completed draft of the newsletter on my desk with a note asking me to be "brutal" in my feedback. The layout was effective and the contents appropriate; I made some relatively minor suggestions at the sentence level and reorganized the "Letter from the President." I could have sent the draft along its way to publication, but the newsletter had a major problem: unsurprisingly in VisionCorps' environment, the newsletter was male focused. The clip art and icons were male, the pronouns were male, the stories were male, the newsletter was all male. I wasn't offended; I knew Russ too well, and we'd had many conversations, in our half-joking, give-and-take manner, about gender in the workplace. But I did think about how interesting the reactions to the newsletter could be for my research. Quickly, however, I decided that a potentially interesting research situation was much less important than heading off an embarrassing blunder, especially when the new corporation wanted so badly to create a positive image. My reactions and my feedback would also provide another opportunity to raise gender awareness in this culture. I had few doubts about my participatory response to the newsletter draft.
This second example involved a more difficult ethical situation for me. Late on a Friday afternoon, Jay stopped by my cube. He too was a software engineer at the time of the spin off but soon after began to create a place for himself in the new corporation as a negotiator with Parent Corp, as the person who could be responsible for legal issues such as patents and copyrights to protect Vision Corp's ownership of their nebulous "property," and as the company expert in international regulations and requirements. As he developed these new job responsibilities, he found himself writing many documents, and thus our relationship also expanded. I asked more questions, and so did he. Usually our conversations evolved in theoretical directions as we discussed communication issues and problems. Some of the employees, perhaps motivated by envy, found Jay pushy and "turf grabbing"; he does have a strong vision for the corporation and a design for his role in making things happen.

He wondered if I had time to talk about the strategic planning document he was writing. Naturally I was up against a deadline to have a manual ready to mail out Monday morning, but I made time. We sat next to each other at the small, conference-room table, and he waited as I quickly read through the document; although it was the first time I'd seen it, I was aware of the document because of references to it on the company's e-mail. I asked questions, filling in context and details for the document's use, audience, purpose, and so on. The strategic planning document was evolving as an agenda for the strategic planning team meetings, from notes of these meetings and because of Jay's vision for the company. It was a living document for internal use only, and it was shaping the corporation's definition of itself and its future. Jay asked me to read the document because he was confused and wanted some help with revisions. I offered to help
him edit it, and made suggestions about the order of sections and some consistency problems with headers and terminology. Those "surface" problems weren't Jay's concern. He explained that as the team members had read through the document together at the day's meeting, everything was going great until they got about half way through. Jay pointed to a section. He asked me if I could understand why the meeting had suddenly gone wrong and the group had suddenly turned antagonistic. And could I help him rewrite those paragraphs? He needed to do some damage control to keep the group functioning.

His textual problems seemed pretty apparent to me. Up until that point in the document, the text about corporate policy and its vision was uncontroversial, but with the section Jay noted, the content moved into an area that represented a deep split in the way the corporation was perceived. Half of the employees supported a conservative vision for the company and half of them a more innovative vision. The conservatives promoted an approach that meant continued close relationships with Parent Corp and a reliance on them for most of their orders and income. The innovators promoted a vision of cutting loose from the old to forge a new independence and new products. Jay was an innovator, and in this section of the document, his words forced his vision and undercut those of the conservatives. He had presented no persuasive argument nor acknowledged any merit in the other view.

The situation was difficult for me, not in having ideas about making his writing more persuasive and palatable, but in knowing whether or not I should take part in strengthening his case. I stalled and sought reassurances that the strategic planning team knew I was reading their document and that they approved. Jay assured me that it was fine and that he would even include my
name in the cover memo to the document, and as was their custom, in the next
draft he would label any change suggestions with names, including mine. We
talked about the document’s problems, especially with tone, and strategized
alternatives. I didn’t really think my interactions would change the direction of the
corporation, but I worried about the affect I would have on the document and on
its "success."

Both of these examples tell of my ethical dilemmas as an ethnographer and
of the relatedness of my dilemmas with ethical situations of VisionCorps’
employees; they are much blurred together. For me these dilemmas are usually
about communication, often written documents, and involve complex rhetorical
situations. These situations occur because of change, because VisionCorps’
employees are responding to and forcing change. My decisions also implicate me
in change as I participate in and influence the rhetorical situations of this
corporation in flux.

* * *

It’s 8:00 p.m. and I’m on my way across town to Sandy’s house. She had
called me at home earlier, my typical Wednesday grading-and-writing day, to ask if
I would be able to spend some time with her, revising and updating her resume.
And she’s pressed for time; she needs the document for Friday when she plans to
visit out-of-town friends to start actively networking for another position. At first
I had been surprised—surprised in the sense that I was caught off-guard and didn’t
quite know how to respond. I knew she was thinking of career alternatives, and in
our conversations she often complained about aspects of her work, but who didn’t?
For the remainder of the day I had weighed my ethical responsibilities. Sandy has
become a close friend, and I want to do what I can to help her. On the other hand,
I feel a loyalty to VisionCorps that precludes my helping employees leave their employment, especially since I realize how valuable Sandy is to the corporation. She would be hard to replace because of her excellent work and because of her intimate knowledge of Parent Corp and VisionCorps; with almost 15 years of employment, she knows whom to talk to about what and many intricacies of her documentation specialist position, all of which could not easily be passed on to another.

The uneasiness I'm feeling in my stomach—what I've come to recognize as part of my ethnographer's ethical alarm system—begins to lessen as Sandy and I talk about her decision to start investigating other opportunities. It isn't that I'm feeling less subversive toward the other VisionCorps' employees; I realize her need to talk through her decision and to get reassurance on the document. I'm not making any decisions for her, mostly listening. I'll empathize with VisionCorps' owners and employees if she leaves, but her leaving won't be because of me.

I read through her three-page resume as she opens a bottle of wine and takes down antique, stemmed glasses. I'm at the large wooden table in her warm, friendly kitchen, the typical gathering spot of her close circle of friends. Her resume is good but needs updating, and we can improve it. I don't hesitate. This could be fun; she has so much experience to work with. As I suggest how to vary her resume to highlight her different strengths and experiences, she talks more directly about her dissatisfactions with VisionCorps and the kind of work she thinks she wants. I ask about the timing of her leaving, wondering if she could consider the product development cycles; we agree that there probably will never be a good time.
Her calm and confident voice reflects the considerable thought that has preceded her actions today in polishing up her resume; she's not just responding to the intensity of the development-cycle demands. "Even on those days when I am so angry that I just want to walk out the front door and not look back, I know that I can't really leave that way. I'll have to give them lots of lead time and probably provide some training."

Sandy continues thinking out loud, "I know that part of it is just general burn-out and job pressures, but that really isn't the main problem."

We finish with her resume. She decides to develop a couple of different versions to keep online, but then hesitates about putting it on her VisionCorps' computer and having to use the high-quality printer that is shared by all of the documentation specialists. "I guess I don't have much of a choice, but I don't want to have to explain what I'm doing to any of the people at work."

"I'm just tired of being the heavy all the time; lots of these guys still resent me because they think I'm the reason they have to stop coding. They always blame me for a products' being late for a release even when they put me in a time bind and use up all of my scheduled time, or neglect to read drafts, or to provide me with critical information."

"Don't you think that's just a few individuals? Remember that you've been working with the 'Pretty Boys' and some of them have an attitude that makes them difficult to work with."

"I guess you're right," Sandy agrees, "But my unhappiness is also about the cyclical nature of what I do, manual after manual, with releases not even finished before another is begun. Sometimes I don't think I can stand to open a file to do even one more update on a manual that I've worked on over and over again."
"You may not be feeling valued by all of the computer engineers you work with, but overall they appreciate you, even if they don't let you know it. And what about all those raises and bonuses? They mean something, especially since they aren't straight across the board for all employees."

"Yes, that's the hard part; they're making it very difficult to walk away. Mostly the money, and also I have a lot of say on decisions. Would I be in that position other places? And then again I don't even think this is what I want to do much longer. It may be time for a big career move; then I wouldn't have to deal with the development cycles over and over again."

"Doesn't the learning help and the problem solving? Your job has lots of repetitiveness but also some real opportunities to move in new directions. I've seen a number of significant changes in the last three years, and you've been involved in all that decision-making about figuring out new aspects of VisionCorps' documentation. You've been involved in selecting and implementing the new book-building software, developing the templates, designing the beta-test process to elicit direct-customer feedback, planning for writing and editing online documentation, figuring out SGML processes for all the manuals—and those are just some of the changes that come to mind."

"Yes, those are the more fun things, but it's also stressful for me, especially since I do all of that on top of my regular work."

I can't resist using her opening to guide our conversation in a direction we'd often traveled, but I know I have to tread gently. "You really can only do so much. And even though it's difficult, you could think about turning over some of that work to others; don't do so many manuals and don't go to so many meetings. You could hoard your time for some of the more appealing work."
"I know what you're saying, but I feel such a sense of responsibility; sometimes I think I'm the safeguard against an erosion of quality in our work. I really do have lots of ownership and pride in it all. And if I don't go to all of those meetings, I don't know what's going on. In lots of ways it's difficult to grow into a documentation department after being the only one."

I respond, "There sure aren't many easy answers." Then in support, I describe a conversation I'd had the previous day with Paul and Jack (both computer engineers). "Yesterday, I kinda converged with Paul and Jack in the entry area of the upstairs hallway, the open place at the top of the stairs between that wildly growing plant and the railing. We stood and talked for the longest time. I think they were sensing that I'll soon be leaving. And even more than usual, they were forthright and willing to analyze and discuss their ideas. Actually, it was like they wanted to make sure that we connected, that I understood them and VisionCorps. Mostly, they ruminated about their becoming self-managed teams and the 'costs.'

Jack pretty much summed up their feelings about work at VisionCorps, "It's hard, and we get tired. But even if it were possible to go back, I couldn't."
V. FOSTERING KNOWLEDGE WORKERS

The ethnopoetics that I knew was, first & last, the work of poets. Of a certain kind of poet. As such its mission was subversive, questioning the imperium even while growing out of it. Transforming. It was the work of individuals who found in multiplicity the cure for that conformity of thought, of spirit, that generality that robs us of our moments. That denies them to the world at large. A play between that otherness inside me & the identities imposed from outside. It is not ethnopoetics as a course of study—however much we wanted it—but as a course of action. "I" is an "other," then; becomes a world of others. It is a process of becoming. A collaging self. Jerome Rothenberg

"So what's the meeting about this afternoon?" I've already skimmed through my e-mail and noticed the announcement of a company-wide meeting at 3:00. Friday afternoon is an unusual day of the week and time for a VisionCorps' meeting; besides, company-wide meetings are usually announced weeks in advance so people can fit them into their schedules.

I'm making the first coffee of the day in the breakroom, and Sandy is filling me in on the last couple of days. "I can't tell you this time. You'll know soon. We can talk later, after the meeting if you want."

I try to keep my expression from registering the surprise I feel; Sandy has kept very little from me during my three years of fieldwork. After a brief pause, I turn the discussion to other ground, hoping to let her know that I respect her position.

As with most days, the hours pass quickly—so much to do with VisionCorps' projects and with my own research. Although the upstairs has been filled today—almost all of the employees are in town and in the building—it has been quiet—perhaps, expectant. Obviously, not everyone knows what's going on. Sandy, and who else? I haven't asked others, but I also haven't seen the milling
around and discussing over the cube walls and in the intersections of the narrow hallways that usually accompanies "news."

I join the others in the back stairway; our steps echo in the closed-in space. We quickly file into the breakroom, filling the padded chairs around the tables. There are no latecomers today, no casual lingerers.

I look around the quiet, crowded room. These are the original survivors, 44 (plus a few additions now) of the well over 100 members of Parent Corps' development unit. They are still lean. For a while they were motivated by the idea that they were an integral part of the hand-selected, "best-of-the-best" from Parent Corps' personnel; they thought of themselves as "lean," "streamlined," and "determined producers." But now, they are also tired and, perhaps, less enthusiastic. In their Parent Corps' cubes on a cold, windy Friday afternoon three years earlier, they had gently packed up their belongings—photos and posters, journals, manuals, letters and memos, awards and gag gifts, everything but their PCs that were part of the professional moving package—and carried their boxes into this newly remodeled location, unpacked on Saturday, and were back in business on Monday. They never missed a beat. And that's the way they like to think of themselves—capable, independent, and yet integral parts of the VisionCorps Team. They have often been tested during these three years and yet are building an increasingly profitable corporation; however, the continual struggle of interaction and of the immediacy of their product market has long since dissipated the fresh honeymoon glow and enthusiasm.

Ben breaks from the other two owners with whom he has been huddled in conference in the furthermost corner of the large room. Pulling his stylish, dark suit-jacket together and working the button as he moves, he arrives at the "head"
of the room in a few strides, smiling, confident. He pauses as if trying to instill his
good cheer on those before him.

But he's greeted by silence. The employees sit waiting, quiet, expectant,
but trusting; they are not accustomed to surprises from this leader. He is one of
them, a friend, a survivor. "Hey, we got you all together today so we could share
with you what we think is a great idea!" I scan the room wondering if the
employees also are confused because they have heard nothing about this "great
idea" before this. Typically, ideas are discussed, informally face-to-face and on e-
mail, before any of them get to this kind of presentation format. What are the
owners proposing?

"Joel, Ted, and I have been meeting and working hard to put this idea
together for you." Following this initial salespitch, Ben moves into an explanation
of the additional contracts they are committing the company to. "You work hard
now, and we need you to do even more. Because we're young, we can't afford to
pass up any great-looking opportunities. And we have an interesting one knocking
on our door right now. But it won't just mean that we'll be asking you to work
harder; we've got a suggestion for incentives to go along with these contracts."

He flips on the overhead machine and begins explaining an elaborate plan,
complete with transparencies and charts. He details a new incentive plan that
offers substantial rewards for completing certain tasks. Those less interesting or
those related to less desirable aspects of the business are matched with dollar
amounts. An intricate system of interlocking tasks, qualifications for the jobs,
and their pay-offs in thousands-of-dollar amounts are displayed on the big screen
across the front of the room.
The employees quickly understand the incentive plan, but no one speaks in response. The silence lengthens. No one whispers; no one comments; no one even exchanges glances. Ben shuffles transparencies, searching for the one that might break the silence.

Finally, from the middle of the room, a computer engineer speaks. He's just one of the guys, no one any more special nor any more known for his leadership nor any more committed to values than any of the other employees. He says, simply, "No." Firmly, making clear that he's neither posing a question nor willing to allow himself to be convinced, he states his position: "Your plan would destroy the idea of teams. We don't want that. We'll get the work done, like we always do, but we'll keep doing it as teams." He nods, stands, and begins the exodus to the back stairs.

The VisionCorps' employees disperse—the team members, the knowledge-workers—toward the back stairs and up to Development, down the first-floor hallway toward Marketing, to the small Management Information Support cubes in the opposite first-floor corner, and to the Production and Distribution offices. Work continues as usual. The incentive plan with its big, individualized rewards just doesn't happen. When I bring up the meeting with many employees, I always get a short response: "It wouldn't work; we're not interested in that."

Sandy explains later that for about a month she and, to her knowledge, one other computer engineer had known about the plan because they had been offered incentives for some special, over-time work, "Do you remember those two Saturdays and those later-than-usual evenings? Alex was working then too."
I think back on how tired she has been and on my cautions about computer strain and burn-out. "So now what? Do you get an incentive? Did you work out details with Joel?"

She shrugs, "I don't know if I'll ever see any extra money. Joel hasn't said for sure; they don't want to start any unpopular precedents." She pauses and adds quietly, "I sure didn't think people would feel so strongly... . I was surprised ... impressed."

**Official Valuing**

In Chapter 4, I cite the first objective listed by the Strategic Planning Team in VisionCorps' *Strategy Document*. For this concluding chapter on Fostering Knowledge-Workers, the second objective is significant because it describes the kind of work environment valued by the employees:

**Objectives**

2. **Create a corporate environment that fosters communication, innovation, risk-taking, and fun.**

The key elements of this goal are "communication, innovation, risk-taking, and fun." To foster communication, we must take actions to ensure effective communication among all of the individuals, teams, committees or task forces within the company. Our development organization, for example, has organized into self-managed teams. These tightly knit teams foster communication and cooperation among team members. Our monthly SCOOP then helps promote inter-team communication.

Creativity and innovation are crucial to VisionCorps' ability to develop interesting new products. The necessary ingredients for innovation and creative products include time, training, and tools. We must have the
freedom to experiment with new (but related) technology. We must have access to both information and tools needed to implement performance management products that we can easily differentiate from our competitors' products.

It is important to recognize that innovation and creativity require occasional, yet inevitable, failure. Innovation equals risk. We must be certain that reasonable risk-taking and occasional failure are not punished. We must also make sure that success is quickly rewarded.

The last element of our second goal is "fun." Fun can mean freedom to do interesting work. Fun also means a friendly, supportive environment full of achievement, pride, trust, and cooperation.

2.1 Ensure that communication flows throughout the company.

2.1.1 Monthly SCOOP.

2.1.2 Electronic mail.

2.1.3 Monthly and weekly online reports (available for all to read).

2.1.4 Staff meetings.

2.2 Provide employees with tools needed to do more than minimum requirements.

2.3 Refrain from punishing risk-takers.

2.4 Welcome families and friends.

2.5 Work hard/play hard.

2.5.1 Provide health club membership.

2.5.2 Provide pizza on $1M days.

2.5.3 Provide an annual Christmas party.

2.5.4 Provide an annual summer picnic.
2.6 Encourage related education through tuition reimbursement.

2.7 Provide a bonus/performance shares program to reward employees.

Although it doesn't actually say "support knowledge-workers," this second objective details what it takes for VisionCorps to create and maintain an atmosphere conducive to fostering them: "communication, innovation, risk-taking, and fun." As sub-points under "fun," the document also names "freedom to do interesting work, achievement, pride, trust, and cooperation." By focusing on the employees and providing the necessary ingredients to keep them happy in their jobs, the Strategic Planning Team believes VisionCorps will create and maintain a successful work environment and engender employee commitment to VisionCorps.

Written by the Strategic Planning Team (and their revisers) and, in particular, by Jay, these objectives originate more broadly from discussions with numerous employees and from the corporate theorists/consultants who wrote the books that VisionCorps' owners and employees were reading as they drafted this document.¹ Thus, the official objectives were written in corporate agreement between the owners and the employees, as they invent themselves, the corporation, and their work environment. The employees' refusal to consider the owners' proposal for incentive pay shows their commitment to the team-based management approach; they actively support the words of this official document.

Unofficial Valuing

If you think about VisionCorps in a traditional, modernist corporation way, the actions of the employees in their unified manner of refusal might be considered

¹In an earlier draft, Jay quotes directly from a book, mentioning by author and title some of the more direct influences on the team and on his drafting.
subversion, going against the authority of the corporation's owners. The employees considered the offer and rejected it. They are committed to their way of working and so certain that their opinions will be heard that they can ignore thousands of dollars to continue with their team-based management approach. They didn't refuse to take on the additional contracts; they're aware of the tenuous nature of their new business. They also believe that ultimately they will be more successful, both in work satisfaction and in salaries and profit sharing.

I expected the owners to come back with another, similar plan or a more direct imperative. But they didn't. They basically got what they needed: the employees agreed to work even harder and longer to meet the new contract demands. When I think about this incident and consider it from the perspective of a rhetorical corporation, the owners were the ones to act in a negative, subversive manner. To some extent the employees' reaction to the offer reflected their surprise and disappointment that the owners would shortsightedly ignore their management objectives. The incident suggests, perhaps, the difficulty for owners and employees of turning management concepts into actions.

VisionCorps' problems are not those of the traditional, modernist corporation, which are often precipitated by the hierarchies, by the distances and disagreements between those above and those below. That is not to say that VisionCorps' owners and employees have no problems; you have read about many. Their problems aren't caused, however, by distances but primarily by the immediacy of the environment and the intensity of work relationships. Although the balance between owners and employees, and between employees and employees is what makes VisionCorps work, this balancing of knowledge workers is delicate. VisionCorps relies on good facilitators (One reason Sandy stays is
because Joel does a good job of facilitating.) and good collaborators. Because
knowledge workers have expert skills and/or valuable experience, and because
they are committed and responsible, they are valuable, and they also are difficult
to balance. VisionCorps' environment is seldom one of consensus or easy
agreement. In addition to the problems of balancing strong personalities,
VisionCorps' problems stem from too much work per employee, the monotony of
repetitive development cycles, and difficulties in hiring and training additional
knowledge workers. Most important is a good fit so that employees understand
the responsibilities and opportunities of knowledge workers.

Valuing Otherness

In the concept of knowledge workers, my study of VisionCorps and my
discussion of interpretive ethnography come together. In previous chapters, I
made connections for these two themes and elaborated analogously. Think now of
the relationship between knowledge workers in VisionCorps and the valuing of
others in interpretive ethnography not as an analogy but as a merging. While
analogies relate in parallel to juxtapose and to provide a new way of thinking,
knowledge-workers are the valued others in VisionCorps and knowledge-workers
are the other voices of my interpretive ethnography; they are the same
individuals. As an interpretive/externalist ethnographer I know that my story is
being "written" or created by many others' voices and that I am also writing to
make obvious these many voices and their blend in mine. And as a teller of the
VisionCorps' story, I am also emphasizing the critical appreciation of otherness,
or of knowledge-workers, in rhetorical corporations.

As an interpretive ethnographer, I attempt to "voice" the others who are
creating this ethnography, to make their presence obvious, and to make that clear
to my readers so that they too look at the text and not through it. Tyler describes this ethnographic perspective as post-modern and suggests that the ethnographer could create a "polyphonic text":

Because post-modern ethnography privileges 'discourse' over 'text,' it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendental observer. In fact, it rejects the ideology of 'observer-observer,' there being nothing observed and no one who is observed. There is instead the mutual, dialogic production of a discourse, of a story of sorts. We better understand the ethnographic context as one of cooperative story making that, in one of its ideal forms, would result in a polyphonic text, none of whose participants would have the final word in the form of a framing story or encompassing synthesis—discourse on the discourse. 126

Although I too believe that ethnographic writing can be and is less transcendental observation and more interactional communication, as an externalist I need to convince readers that, although there are others' voices in this writing, I am not attempting to abandon my "authority"; I have no need to. I agree with Rabinow that relinquishing authority is theoretically impossible: "The anthropologist retains his or her authority as a constituting subject and representative of the dominant culture. Dialogic texts can be just as staged and controlled as experimental or interpretive texts. The mode offers no textual guarantees" ("Representations" 246). Rather, I believe that voices are a blend of determinant and indeterminant others' voices; I, others, and our contexts are all components of communicative interaction and understanding. Therefore, from my interpretist/externalist perspective, my concern, my obligation, is to create access to the voices, to listen in the active sense of availing myself to others and of engaging myself in their stories. I am not just watcher and gatherer but a listener, an asker of questions, and a participator because I value, I depend upon, the
voices and stories of others. These others' voices—mine, the VisionCorps' interpreters, and yours as my readers/interpreters—create the story.

In previous chapters, I write about other changes toward rhetorical corporations: decentralizing, projectizing, and creating simultaneous processes. These changes depend upon knowledge workers. Decentralization eliminates widespread corporate divisions and concentrates on primary services to pare-down managerial functions and, therefore, hierarchies of control. Decentralization depends on knowledge workers as primary decision-makers who no longer report to or require layers of management protection. Projectizing breaks down traditional and distinct corporate divisions to create teams that can respond rapidly to customers and generate innovative solutions and opportunities. Projectizing depends on knowledge workers to collaborate in creative problem-solving and to work with others' diverse talents while holding their own in teams of diverse stakeholders. Simultaneous processes respond to increased pressures of a sped-up marketplace and provide an alternative to the sequential ordering of work. Simultaneous processes depend on knowledge workers for proactive decision-making and for the means to eliminate hierarchical and wasteful delays. These three corporate changes depend on talented, invested, creative—non-interchangeable employees. Rhetorical corporations need knowledge workers. Therefore, interactions between owners and employees are not the same as when they, owners and employees both, thought workers were interchangeable.

The balance in VisionCorps' owner/employee relationships is different than it was for them in Parent Corp. Most of these same people worked for Parent Corps; were they all knowledge workers then? Yes and no. They obviously performed their jobs well; they were the ones chosen for the spin-off corporation.
However, brilliance, experience, and expertise were not the only criteria upon which the three owners made their decisions. They also considered the ability to get along with others, creativity, and a quality the owners had difficulty explaining—something like the desire to grow, or improve, or to "envision." The owners’ venture, their gamble was hedged by their background with these employees; the employees too wagered on the owners and each other. In many ways, they formed a clan-like relationship; as equals, they joined together their talents for a common goal or survival, trusting in an almost familial and, often, volatile relationship.

* * * *

My official letter of resignation is not a surprise to anyone at VisionCorps. We all know that my part-time position depends on my dissertation research, and when I determine that my fieldwork is complete, I’ll leave. It is an arbitrary decision. Mostly, it means more time for me to spend writing.

Actually, I’m surprised when Joel asks if I will write a letter; he explains, "We need it for your files and that legal stuff. And then we can plan your party."

I spend my last morning in separate exit interviews with the owners and the personnel director. They think it might seem like a change for them to be interviewing me instead of the other way around, but I still learn from them. We plow through their list of questions, and I try to elaborate in response. But as usual, they talk most. Our conversations focus on the responsibility they feel for facilitating individuals' work and for keeping the employees happy.

"We're especially concerned about Anil." Joel explained. "Now that his wife has joined him from India, we're hoping that he will be more satisfied with his job;
we sure need his expertise on this new project. And we also need ideas for keeping
his wife happy. Do you have any suggestions for making her feel welcome?"

We talk about some possibilities to help her meet people in the corporation
and the community.

And we talk about employees' technology needs, and seminars and
conferences, and ways to balance work loads. Soon it's time for lunch.

I ride with Sandy to our favorite restaurant across from the park by the
lake. "I've been dreading this day for weeks. Maybe we could still have lunch
occasionally? You'll want to keep up on the VisionCorps' events for a while
anyway, won't you?" I nod agreement.

Lunch is easier. The three owners and many of the employees are crowded
into the friendly restaurant, especially those with whom I've worked and listened
to the most. They animatedly discuss events from the VisionCorps' local to the
international. And as usual, the conversations are noisy and humorous. During
the customary joking and kidding, one of my co-workers unintentionally summed
up the concept of knowledge-workers. (I never heard anyone at VisionCorps use
the term although other restructuring jargon was often tossed about.) Those
around me are discussing the complicated issues of proprietary information and
joking about my "making off with" information or knowledge.

My co-worker turns the conversation serious as she comments that it
really didn't matter how many manuals or papers I take with me (I had just been
given stacks as "gifts"), "That stuff doesn't really count; it isn't valuable to
VisionCorps. But the minute an employee walks out the door, we're diminished."
An unusual calm greets us as we leave the restaurant; with the children back in school, we hear none of the busy summer lake sounds, no boaters, no swimmers, no children in the park.

The lake is its most glorious in the fall. The angle of the sun catches the ripples and they glisten as no other time of year. And the shoreline is now uncluttered and natural.

But that's because the boats have been stored for the season.
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