

LANDING GEAR, LETTUCE, BOUQUETS, AND HOME HEALTH AIDES:
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND THE SURPRISING RESILIENCE OF
INEFFICIENCY IN ENTREPRENEURIAL BUSINESSES

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Landing Gear, Lettuce, Bouquets, and Home Health Aides: Organizational Culture and
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Organizational scholars have traditionally argued that formalized operations to regulate the flow of business activities and employee policies to coordinate work distribution are essential for small enterprising business sustainability and growth. However, empirical findings show that small firms do not develop, implement, or provide oversight of formal organizational practices. While small businesses seem to lack the organizational structures that are assumed to be essential for “rational” business operations and sustainability, many flourish. In order to better understand how small enterprising businesses are able to create and maintain stable organizations and adapt to internal and external pressures, this cross-industry ethnographic study of four firms examines the daily work of business owners, managers, and employees. Through a cultural analysis focusing on interpersonal relationships and the way daily business activities are legitimized, challenged, and occasionally transformed, I find that entrepreneurial firms enact three different small group performances. I label these cultural performances: routine business performance, routine crisis performance, and routine growth performance. Rather than standard operating procedures, proper emergency planning, or strategic growth initiatives, the ongoing creation of group histories, meanings, and

affiliations provide the needed material to generate small group cohesion that creates order in entrepreneurial firms.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

How do small firms generate order and stability? Although management scholars have traditionally argued that formal routines and structures are necessary for firm stability and growth (Penrose 1959), few studies have investigated the inner workings of small firms (e.g. Scase and Goffee 1980; Ram 1994; Holliday 1995; Ram 1996; Haugh and McKee 2004) to determine if such assumptions hold up in practice. Anyone who has visited a quintessential main street storefront or worked with small business-to-business operations find that the operating procedures of small businesses can typically be characterized as informal—from hiring and promotion of employees, to negotiating product and service pricing, to relational practices within the organization as well as between employees and customers (Scase and Goffee 1980). Contrary to prevailing notions of effective firm organizing, researchers have found that many of these small businesses are successful, despite limited formal operating procedures (Ram 1994; Holliday 1995; Haugh and McKee 2004). Since small firms do not instantiate these management theories, what are the forces that enable small businesses to operate productively? In this dissertation, I investigate the daily work of small business owners, managers, and employees, to evaluate when organizations operate in an orderly and effective manner with limited structure and oversight, and I describe when more formal authority or rational procedures be needed.

For small businesses, formal procedures to regulate the flow of business activities along with employee policies to coordinate work distribution are claimed to be essential operating mechanisms (Churchill and Lewis 1983; Aldrich 2008). Organizing routines and activities are also believed to enable organizations to gain control over their

resources in order to support the organization's primary activities (Aldrich 2008). Indeed, it is typically assumed that successful organizations learn from situated responses and experiences during their founding processes (Aldrich and Ruef 2006). This experiential knowledge is recorded as organizational memory.

In larger organizations, researchers find that the rules, procedures, technologies, beliefs and cultures are conserved through systems of socialization and control (Levitt and March 1988). Thus, organizational experiences and knowledge result in the emergence of reproducible routines (Nelson and Winter 1982) that structure how organizational members operate. Although this early (and foundational) organizational research focused on large, complex firms, capturing processes by documenting and formalizing routines as standard operating procedures that organizational members follow when they work and interact (March and Simon 1958) is a strategy that is also described as critical for small firm viability (Aldrich and Ruef 2006).

In addition to developing firm routines to harness and employ resources, researchers suggest that organizational roles or jobs develop from the process of moving from chaotic organizational responses to deliberate organized activity. While new roles or idiosyncratic jobs normally develop around individuals' particular competencies (Aldrich 2008), such emergence should not be the norm once a firm moves beyond its initial formation and growth period. Once a firm begins to establish itself as a viable entity, those jobs that are most effective at promoting the organization's goals should be the ones that survive and are reproduced (Miner 1990).

Researchers suggest that the combination of organizational routines and formal roles importantly helps to establish organizational legitimacy and mitigate a young

organization's liability of newness (Stinchcombe 1965). Instituting formal internal coordination demonstrates organizational reliability and accountability, and suggests firm structures are reproducible and thus stable. Highly reproducible structures generate stronger inertial pressures, which, according to an evolutionary theory of organizations, would lead these organizations to be favored by the selection process (Singh et al. 1986). Firms with reliable routines also demonstrate organizational legitimacy, which signals to both internal and external stakeholders that the organization appears reliable and accountable, and thus a viable business (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Hannan and Freeman 1984). Furthermore, firms that undertake activities to generate legitimacy reduce the possibility of the venture disbanding and facilitate the transition to other organizing activities including new resource acquisition and firm growth (Delmar and Shane 2004).

Researchers prescriptively suggest that when organizational leaders are unable to institute formal structures, routines, and job positions, they should bring in "professional managers" to help "rationalize" the organization and make it more efficient (Schein 1983). Business growth frameworks in preeminent business journals aimed at managers, propose that all small businesses experience common problems of organizing at different stages of their development. In order to grow, researchers recommend that firms put into place functional managers with specific duties and institute formal systems of coordination (Churchill and Lewis 1983).

This line of reasoning seems to be particularly prevalent among family business researchers who sometimes cast family-run businesses as informal and idiosyncratic where decision-making is based on intuition (Dyer 1989). Most startups either formally employ family members or informally use their families' assistance (Kirchoff and

Kirchoff 1987; Chrisman et al. 2003). Moreover, it is estimated that 92% of all U.S. companies are considered family businesses (Shanker and Astrachan 1996). Through the introduction of a professional manager with qualified management skills and decision-making tools based in rationality, it has been suggested for decades that a family run organization can capitalize on its enterprising “paternalism” when coupled with “managerialism” as complementary ideologies of organizing business operations (Dyer 1989; Johannisson 2002; Annika and Nordqvist 2008).

Despite models of firm success requiring increasingly formal processes and structures, small businesses often fail to develop and implement standardized organizational routines, and job roles are often blurred. Nonetheless, many small businesses thrive.

Small Business Success

According to the Small Business Administration (SBA), in 2010 there were over 27.9 million small businesses, accounting for 64% of net new private-sector jobs (SBA 2012). Small business entry, or startup, rates have been generally higher than exit rates, resulting in an increasing number of small businesses over time (Headd et al. 2010). Thus, the prevalence and continuous rise of small businesses in the United States suggests that small businesses are capable of adapting to environmental changes to survive and grow. Importantly, researchers have recognized that firms do not need clear strategies or personnel attending to the task of organizational learning or oversight. Organizations can adapt without specifying goals (Burgelman 1983) or even learning (Fiol and Lyles 1985). Resource limitations and structural inefficiencies may be endemic to small businesses, and cannot provide an explanation for business success or failure.

Why Small Businesses Fail to Implement Protocols and Procedures

Researchers suggest that small business owners and managers fail to implement formal organizational processes and develop new organizational capabilities (Zahra and Filatotchev 2004) for three primary reasons: lack of time, limited decision making foresight, and inefficient employees. First, it is believed that business owners are concerned with immediate necessities, such as securing monthly financial obligations (e.g. payroll, rent, inventory receipts, etc.) and fulfilling client order requests, and they simply do not have time to develop, implement, or provide oversight of formal organizational practices (Ram 1994). Others find that small business owners do not want to invest more time in managerial oversight and thus they limit their company's business activities to avoid the need to institute stringent business policies altogether (Goffee and Scase 1995).

Second, small business decision-making has been shown to rely on heuristics and simplified decision-making rules that expedite action, rather than the development of strategic long-term plans (Gedajlovic et al. 2011). Such satisficing (Tait 1990; Holliday 1995) results in the implementation of short-term solutions rather than optimal long-term resolutions. According to Holliday (1995), who conducted participant observation research at four small manufacturing firms, strategic decision making was informal, ad hoc processes were found in all firms she studied, and decisions were made on a trial-and-error basis. Holliday (1995:137) found that, "[h]ow quickly a change was made depends on how disastrous the consequences of action were."

Third, small businesses are found to have inefficient employees (Holliday 1995) making daily activities cumbersome to complete. Small business owners often have

irregular relations with suppliers and customers (Goffee and Scase 1995) making just-in-time production difficult to manage, and focused marketing for clients more complicated to harness. Tait (1990) found that managers have a poor understanding of their own management education needs, resulting in ineffective management and leadership mistakes due to inadequate work allocation to those with more qualified skill sets.

In addition, researchers have concluded that owners do not implement or enforce many company policies because they are concerned about restricting employees' sense of freedom. Compared to larger businesses, small business managers believe that the limited resources they can provide their employees (e.g. lower pay, irregular work hours, and fewer opportunities for advancement) require managers to compensate employees in other ways. For example, according to some small business owners, employees often expect a high level of autonomy when they work for small businesses (Ram 1994). Although research suggests that differences exist between employers and employees in the amount of autonomy that is actually provided (Ram 1999), small businesses owners generally provide high levels of autonomy and flexibility to employees to retain and motivate them.

The Present Study

Instead of asking why small firms fail to construct and implement formal routines and processes, I investigate the forces that enable small firms to operate productively. This research will show how organizations generate order and stability, and persevere with limited structure and oversight. Furthermore, I demonstrate specific conditions when formal authority or rational procedures may be needed. I research this concern to

evaluate the prevailing notions of how small businesses generate order, and replace those ideas with concepts that more accurately describe small business operations. I investigate the daily work of small business owners and managers, the creation and maintenance of organizational cultures, the attempts to implement processes and routines, and the way organizations change over time. By exploring the inner workings of small businesses and the forces that enables them to operate productively, this research will show how small enterprising businesses are able to generate order, maintain stable organizations, and adapt to environmental fluctuations.

This dissertation analyzes my own ethnographic data, collected over an 18-month period at four small enterprising businesses—an aerospace factory, an organic farm, a florist, and a home health aide placement service. I analyze the data through a small groups framework (Fine 2006; Fine and Fields 2008) to understand how the growth of localized cultures and organizational meanings are developed out of social interactions among employees, managers, and business owners. Accounting for the social dynamics between individual actors, reflections of macro-level concerns within organizational activities, strategic organizational goals, and social skills of firm leaders, I demonstrate how small firms organize and the ways they can successfully adjust to daily changing demands and uncertain climates. Importantly, I explore situations in which formal processes and managerial oversight may enable or inhibit small businesses activity. I find that small businesses can succeed without formal oversight, and in fact, limited formal operating procedures may enable firms to adapt to environmental changes and grow over time.

The Case for Small Businesses

The term small business is a slippery concept. Numerous organizational characteristics, including number of employees, revenue, formal organizational configurations, legal structures, wholesale and retail sales, and industry, may all be considered when defining whether a firm is a small business. Although federal guidelines broadly define small businesses as firms with up to 500 employees, in this dissertation I conceptualize small businesses as those with less than fifty full- or part-time employees. Firms of this size typically have owners who work alongside their employees and are responsible for running their own businesses as well (Scase and Goffee 1980). Within the United States, 96.3% (approximately 5.5 million) of all businesses with payroll have fewer than fifty employees, account for 28.1% (approximately 31.5 million) of all employed workers (SBA 2010). The characteristics of the firms I collected data on for this dissertation are further discussed in Chapter 2.

Small enterprising businesses were selected as the context for investigating organizational processes, stability, and change for several key reasons. Practically, while small businesses hold a position in America's economy as significant employers and contributors to America's GDP, they also hold an important cultural position in America's social imagination. Conceptually, small businesses sit at the intersection of rational choice efficiency models of business operations and the myth of the harmonious "mom and pop main street shop." The pressures and expectations to live up to these ideals (from both those inside the organization as well as from customers and community stakeholders) regularly conflict with the practicalities of running a small business, resulting in dynamic organizing struggles to create stable and prosperous businesses.

From a methodological standpoint, the frequency and high level of interaction small business owners, managers and employees experience with each other (using my restrictive definition) makes small businesses a rich context for a study of routines and culture from an interactionist perspective. I elaborate on these three points below.

Practical Reasons to Investigate Small Businesses

Small business ownership serves as a significant symbol of the American dream. The image of the small business owner as hard working, loyal, and family- and community-oriented looms large in the public's consciousness. Because of this universally positive representation, policy makers often evoke the image of the small business owner for a variety of political and economic aims. For example, during the 2012 presidential election both Mitt Romney and Barack Obama frequently spoke about the significance of entrepreneurs and small businesses to America's post-recession recovery. In fact, they mentioned "small business" twenty-one times in the first presidential debate and twenty-three times in their second debate (Friedman 2012).¹

However, small business rhetoric has not only come from political candidates. Economists, including former Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke,² emphasize the impact of entrepreneurs and new start-ups on America's economy, citing statistics from the Census and the SBA. Notably, the SBA finds that small businesses have generated 65% of net new jobs over the past 17 years (U.S. Department of Commerce 2009),

¹ This emphasis may be based on the belief that small businesses constitute a unified voting bloc, with 11% of registered voters being small business owners, about the same number as union members. When those who work for small businesses are also included, the small business voting bloc swells to nearly one-third

² Bernanke, Ben S. July 12, 2010. At the Federal Reserve Meeting Series: "Addressing the Financial Needs of Small Businesses." Washington, D.C.
<http://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/speech/bernanke20100712a.htm>

accounting for more than 50% of the US workforce (Galvin et al. 2007; Heck and Trent 1999). Small businesses have created more than half of all private GDP, made up 97.5% of all identified exporters, and produced 31% of export value (U.S. Department of Commerce 2009). Although some debate exists about these often-cited statistics (Haltiwanger et al. 2010), researchers contend that small businesses are critical to generating new jobs and contributing to the nation's economy and fiscal security. Thus, as a significant cultural and political symbol, and a critical contributor to the American economy, small businesses constitute an important phenomenon to research and understand.

Despite the importance of small firms, research on small businesses is sparse, particularly ethnographic research. Among businesses with fewer than fifty employees, only a handful of ethnographic studies can be counted: Scase and Goffee (1980), Rainie's (1989) research on industrial relations, Ram's (1994) study on negotiated order between shopfloor employees and management, Holliday's (1995) research on organizing production at three different manufacturers, Stockport and Kakabadse's (1992) study on workers in small high-tech firms, and Haugh and McKee's (2004) research on food processing. However, all these studies were conducted by European scholars and were based primarily on UK businesses. This fact is surprising, considering the SBA (the most prominent government-sponsored organization providing support and funding for small businesses in the U.S.) was founded in 1953. Interest in small business in the UK was not much of a government or academic focus of attention until the development of the Committee of Inquiry on Small Firms commissioned by the Labor Government in 1969

and delivered in 1971, nearly two decades after the creation of the SBA (Blackburn and Smallbone 2008).

Explanations from researchers about the lack of research on small businesses in the U.S. are primarily based on practical concerns of access to small businesses (Holliday 1995). Small business owners tend to work long hours, wear multiple hats, and have very limited time to spend during working hours with someone external to the organization who is not contributing to the organization's bottom line. Even when small businesses can benefit from outside assistance, they typically do not seek support from consultants, enterprise agencies, or training (Curran and Blackburn 1994). In addition, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have increased their audits of businesses dramatically, from 250 businesses in 2007, to more than 3000 in 2012 (Associated Press 2012). While national organizations such as GE and franchise-based firms like Subway were found to employ undocumented workers, research suggests that undocumented workers may be most concentrated among small employers (Morales 1983-1984). Thus, with the possibility of many small businesses employing undocumented workers, many businesses arguably would not want to jeopardize their organizations with the prospect of fines or even jail time to assist with academic research. As a result, gaining access to small businesses has been notoriously difficult (Marlow 1992).

On the demand side, it seems that organization researchers prefer to investigate large organizations. The rationale for this preference may include academic research related concerns such as:

- Internal validity issues related to the small numbers of employees at small businesses from whom information can be gathered and triangulated

- Potentially limited generalizability based on assumptions that business operations are developed from the idiosyncrasies of owners rather than arising from a more general social phenomenon worthy of investigation
- A lack of organizational complexity limiting theory generation or testing
- Research on small businesses does not elicit the same sort of prestige for the academic researcher that studies on large, international organizations garner

Regardless of the many possible reasons, research on the way small businesses work remains meager in the field of management, and nearly non-existent in the United States. Academics, economists, and politicians are all missing evidence to understand how owners, managers and employees make sense of their organizations. I believe that an ethnographic approach to researching small businesses is key to discovering much more about small business operations.

Conceptual Reasons to Investigate Small Businesses

Despite ideological commitments by policymakers about their support for the millions of small businesses and the tens of millions of men and women they employ, arguably neither politicians, economists, nor academics understand the forces that provide order for small businesses, or how they work. Typically, people conceptualize small businesses as scaled-down versions of large businesses (Holliday 1995), often believing small businesses effectively operate according to economic rationality because of their limited resources and simple chain of command. Furthermore, small business owners are believed to transition seamlessly between the roles of managers, salesman, accountant, etc. (Scase and Goffee 1980). Some researchers even suggest that owner-manager firms, especially family firms, are some of the most efficient forms of organizational governance because they avoid the typical transaction costs incurred with multiple layers of leadership (Daily and Dollinger 1992). However, small business

owners have cognitive limitations like all other organizational workers (Simon 1982), are stymied by individual motivations and the disparate goals of employees (Cyert and March 1963), the inefficiencies of their employees (Ram 1994; Holliday 1995), and irregular relations with suppliers and customers (Goffee and Scase 1995).

In addition to perceptions of small businesses as rationally efficient operations, they have also been aligned with values of autonomy, self-reliance, and community. In his international bestseller, *Small is Beautiful* (1973), Schumacher claimed that the praise large industrial organizations were receiving from policy advocates at the time was antithetical to these values. Schumacher emphasized the importance of “small autonomous units,” arguing that large businesses of the time were dehumanizing and their economic objectives were detrimental to environmental sustainability. His ideas were not only popularly recognized, but went on to influence economic initiatives, despite little empirical evidence for justification of the book’s propositions.

An investigation of small business operations and the way managers and owners make strategic decisions about their organizations must be situated in the challenges small businesses face to operate in the shadow of these two identities of what it means to be in small business—that of rational efficiency and that of relational harmony. By investigating the cultural meanings that underlie small business operations, I will also be exploring how small businesses live up to popularly conceived business models and how they do not, as well as how they live up to ideologically charged notions of small business human relations and the ways they do not. These two frameworks for conducting business provide some of the backdrop for identifying and examining the tensions and realities of small business operations.

Methodological Reasons to Investigate Small Businesses

Recently there has been a call to bring ethnographic methods more fully into the study of businesses (Watson 2011). In order to understand the working lives of small business owners, managers and employees, it is critical to witness the daily operations of these organizations. Just as Mintzberg (1971) observed managers to identify “the actual work of managers,” to replace Fayol’s concepts of “vague objectives of managerial work” (p. B-97), my research aims to uncover the actual activities of small business operations and replace the current ideas of how small, stable, enterprising businesses generate order.

Through a realist ethnography (Van Maanen 1988) that explores organizations’ cultures, I am able to identify patterns of social interactions and organizational operations that provide glimpses of small businesses on the ground. In order to conduct this up close research, I exchanged my labor (as a part-time employee or volunteer) for business access, as Stewart (1989), Holliday (1995), Williams (2006), and Sherman (2007) have done in their ethnographic research. This access provided me the opportunity to discover participants’ interpretations of the situations in which they were involved (Becker 1958).

I chose to conduct a multi-site ethnography (Marcus 1998) in order to develop generalizable frameworks to describe the way small businesses operate. Such studies of multiple sites in different industries have proved effective at identifying significant patterns of business operations in a variety of prior qualitative studies (Mintzberg 1971; Peters and Waterman 1982). Based on previous empirical research (Dalton 1959; Haugh and McKee 2004), methodological suggestions (Eisenhardt 1989), and practical time availability to visit multiple field sites simultaneously while writing daily field notes,

analyzing data, and developing interview protocols (Pettigrew 1990), I settled on four cases.

My field sites (described in depth in Chapter 3) include an aerospace factory, an organic farm, a florist, and a home health aide placement company. As an employee at my field sites, I hoed carrots and sorted heirloom tomatoes, created health aide sanitary protocols and checked Tuberculosis test results, processed machinery work orders and counted tail parts for military planes, and arranged bridal party bouquets and sold Christmas trees. Although, it was known to my bosses and fellow employees that my primary motive for work was to collect ethnographic data (rather than to earn an hourly wage), I was surprised by how quickly I was treated as an employee—being reprimanded on my first day for arriving three minutes late at one company; given extra work at another firm because an employee failed to show up; and having to remind one employer of the pay that he owed me (as was the typical experience for other employees!).

By experiencing these organizations as an employee, I had considerable opportunity to witness each company truly from the inside. My data collection includes documentation of close observation and participation of routine business activities in daily field notes, formal interviews, internal document analysis, and industry-related materials, such as trade journals, government-researched trends, etc. This breadth of data provides me the opportunity to explore a broad range of small business issues and concerns, as well as the chance to develop generalizable frameworks for understanding a range of small business behaviors.

Dissertation Structure

The first section of this dissertation, Chapters 2 and 3, sets the stage by identifying the theoretical foundations of this study, the method for obtaining the data, and a description of each field site. In Chapter 2 I describe microinstitutionalism, the conceptual framework through which the data will be analyzed. This framework draws from neoinstitutionalism, institutional logics, negotiated order approaches, and symbolic interactionism to “study a dynamic interplay of broad institutional patterns on the one hand, and local practices and knowledge in fields, organizations and organization subgroups, on the other” (Morrill 2008:30). Microinstitutionalism provides a framework to investigate how environmental concerns (including the life course of industries, fluctuations in the economy, and local and national political oscillations) influence small businesses on the ground. Its framework focuses on the ways employees learn to work together to accomplish firm goals, how they negotiate their responsibilities, and their process for developing shared meanings and value in the work they do. This perspective provides a complex and grounded way to understand how small businesses generate order. Chapter 2 continues with a discussion of the field site selection, describing the parameters of what constitutes a small business, and why I sought out specific industries to investigate.

In Chapter 3 I describe my rationale for defining small businesses in this study, those with less than fifty full time employees, and the way I determined the specific small businesses to study. Then I discuss the ethnographic data collection and analysis process, including the importance of my own perspective and voice in the writing of this dissertation as a participant-observer. Following this background information, I take my

first pass at presenting my data by describing my field sites, including: a general description of the organizations and their products or services, how I gained access to each site and my responsibilities as an employee or volunteer worker, a description of the organizational setting (e.g. what their work spaces look like); and finally a character description of the primary actors I interacted with and who served as informants at each firm.

In the second section of this dissertation, Chapters 4 through 7, I discuss three common performances, or operations, that I found to be enacted in each firm I studied. These performances provide guidance for the way firm leaders and employees alter their attitudes towards and relations with each other under different conditions. In order to mobilize firm resources to accomplish organizational goals in practice, each firm varies its operations according to three organizing performances or operations: routine business performance, routine crisis performance, and routine growth performance. Chapter 4 describes each firm's primary goal that performances are structured around. I describe situations in which each firm operates according to these three performances. Conflicts that arise when firms switch between performances provide glimpses at both shared values as well as incompatible meanings among organizational members—causing strain to the generated order at each firm. On the other hand, seamless adjustment of workflow and responsibilities demonstrate the importance of firm leaders' social skills (Fligstein 1997) and the shared firm values of organizational members.

In Chapter 5 I provide examples of the way firms enact their organizational purposes according to routine business performances. This operation, which occurred most frequently in organizations and was most desired by leaders and employees, existed

when there were no increased demands on firms' resources. Social arrangements and expectations of work during times of routine business operations are based on historical, shared experiences between employees. These experiences provide meaning to their interactions as well as guidance for the appropriate ways to accomplish work. Employees feel the greatest sense of autonomy, pride in work, and sense of meaning during routine business operations and look to return to this performance when internal and external pressures result in deviations from this order.

In Chapter 6 I discuss the operation of work and relations around routine crisis performances. I describe this performance as activities to avoid each organization's "biggest fears." Importantly, these crises are routine, occurring not only regularly, but are often predicted in advance by employees. Despite suggestions by employees that organizational leaders should be able to plan appropriately for crises, firm leaders do not. Instead, periodic routine operations are framed as crises and require employees and leaders to adjust their relations to each other to do what is necessary to stem the firm's "biggest fears" from actualizing. During times of crisis, the leaders in each firm assume a more prominent role, creating a shift in the organization's social arrangements. The transition to routine crisis is not always seamless and can lead to conflict between leaders and employees. It has occasionally led to long-term resentments by employees, which has resulted in employees voluntarily leaving their positions, as well as employee dismissal. Although crises are typically fleeting, these times of resource stretching and high stress require significant relational adjustments by firm employees. These changes typically result in a loss of employee autonomy and power and alter the meaning employees assign to their work.

In Chapter 7, I describe the final performance, that of routine growth. During times of growth, organizational leaders again assume a larger role in the firm's operations, resulting in a shift of resources and relationships. Firm expansion does not simply mean additional business, but it necessitates changes in employees' responsibilities and the meanings associated with work. Organizational reordering during growth seems to cause particular turmoil among employees. These changes result in adjustments of routine business operations and can cause feelings of displacement and angst among employees. Although all firms I studied successfully grew during the duration of my research, it has come with a cost to employee satisfaction and retention.

I conclude the dissertation in Chapter 8 by discussing the significance of these performances for small businesses and speculate about the ways in which these frames may be applicable to analyzing how large businesses maintain order and stability. I also consider how small business support organizations, such as the SBA, incubators and accelerators, and small business consultants may be better able to support small firms' ambitions by helping small business owners focus on organizational culture and meaning creation among employees and managers. Based on the research findings, I also make recommendations for how these findings are applicable to larger organizations. Finally, I argue for the importance of continuing research on small groups, and conceptualizing culture as a dynamic and often tenuous force in generating stability in small entrepreneurial firms.

Chapter 2: Theory and Field Site Selection

Theoretical Foundations for this Study

What are the forces that enable small businesses to operate productively? If small firms fail to develop formal organizational structures, procedures and job designations, as management scholars suggest are required for firm stability and growth, then from where are small business sources of perseverance derived? Many contemporary management theories, including neoinstitutionalism and the theory of institutional logics, identify the role that organizational norms play in shaping businesses and creating stability. These concepts provide an explanation for how firms develop and generate order without the need for formalized routines and processes. However, these perspectives assume a top-down approach, emphasizing how current structures, perceptions of legitimacy, and common societal values influence the activities of organizational actors. These frameworks conceptualize actors as carriers of a variety of logics that they enact, depending on situational context. According to these approaches, actors seem to follow existing protocols. Actors may shape organizations, but the change process is a result of influences from extra-institutional changes, which in turn, influence the frames actors follow.

In contrast to these approaches, microinstitutionalism distinguishes itself from neoinstitutionalism and institutional logics by focusing on micro-processes in organizations—the ongoing interaction of actors where various logics are contested and “meaning evolves via local interactions” (Hallett 2010:67). Rather than focusing on macro-level factors that influence organizational actors, microinstitutionalism emphasizes the way individuals make meaning through *ongoing group activities*.

Microinstitutionalism was developed through research on small groups, lending itself as an ideal perspective to understand how order is generated in small firms.

My data suggests that ongoing interactions and negotiations in groups lead to the development of effective organizational processes and division of labor in small firms. In this way, meanings develop as part of group cultures, and social obligations replace formalized routines. Nevertheless, generating order in this way can be inefficient at times. When normative ways of group operations become strained, for example when resources are limited or diverted to non-routine operations such as managing organizational crises or growth, ongoing group meaning-making requires increased negotiation efforts.

To set the stage for the empirical findings of this research, I discuss below the theoretical and conceptual ideas I use to analyze my data. I draw from a variety of concepts that researchers of organizations have recently sought to join in their own analyses (Morrill 2008). A microinstitutional approach emphasizes micro-sociology and symbolic interactionism perspectives to provide “a dynamic interplay of broad institutional patterns on the one hand, and local practices and knowledge in fields, organizations and organization subgroups, on the other” (Morrill 2008:30). This multi-level analysis investigates how small groups, embedded in the work, structural pressures, and societal myths of small businesses, develop and reproduce group cultures through interactions in their organizations.

By studying small firms from the inside as a participant-observer, I am in a position to draw from my observations and experiences of the daily, micro-level social exchanges and meaning making of employees, managers, and business owners. In this

way, I am responding to Fine and Fields' (2008:132) call to sociologists: "Sociologists are skilled in emphasizing the power of structure in top-down models, but they are less concerned with the ways actors shape structure from the bottom up...[S]ociology depends on analytic incorporation of multiple levels." Through an ethnographic approach, I will contribute to a deeper and more nuanced account of how small businesses are organized and the practices they employ to maintain stable businesses.

Neoinstitutionalism

Neoinstitutionalism (or new institutionalism) recognizes that shared beliefs, norms and institutions structure economic life (Nee 2005). Norms govern interpersonal relations that "both constrain and facilitate behavior by defining the structure of incentives—material and nonmaterial—for individuals situated in a group" (Nee and Ingram 1998:19). New institutionalism calls attention to how norms guide institutions themselves, how companies should be structured and how they should operate. New institutionalism suggests that cultural norms guide organizational practices across various institutions. According to DiMaggio and Powell, new institutionalism "take[s] as a starting point the striking homogeneity of practices and arrangements found in the labor market, in schools, states, and corporations" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:9). In their seminal work on the subject, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that the necessity to achieve organizational legitimacy pressures organizations to adopt structures and practices consistent with those of already-established and dominant organizations.

The "requirement" to conform to certain cultural institutional norms and specific industry standards does not necessary amount to greater efficiency (Meyer and Rowan

1977). Nevertheless, an organization that is considered legitimate is assumed trustworthy by an audience of businesses and customers (Aldrich and Ruef 2006). It is the need to signal trust to audiences, for the purpose of maintaining and attracting new business, which compels businesses to pursue organizational legitimacy, through conformity to commonly-recognized ways of organizing. According to this perspective, we can see how owners of small firms, regardless of the industry they are situated in, would try to arrange their practices and operations like those of successful businesses they see around them. In order to be perceived as a legitimate organization, worthy of conducting business with, it would seem that small firms would want to signal their honesty and dependability through structures and processes that match successful firms. However, small business researchers (Scase and Goffee 1980; Ram 1994; Holliday 1995) find that small firms do not structure their operations, nor develop formal procedures that one would expect for a business to signal legitimacy. Instead, small firms remain loosely-structured, informal enterprises. Thus, new institutionalism is limited in its capacity to help us understand small firms' lack of formal structures.

Although the new institutionalism perspective may not help us understand why small firms maintain informal operations, new institutionalism's emphasis on structure provides an explanation for actors' opportunities and constraints for action. Behaviors in this framework are conceptualized as potential actions available to actors—structures and organizational context provide the possibilities for action and the behaviors actors will eventually take. The (somewhat limited) variety of available actions are carried around in individuals' heads (Swidler 1986) and negotiated in different contexts and within different interpersonal relationships. This perspective is useful in conceptualizing the

types of choices that individuals in similar contexts are able to select from. Certainly, firm owners, managers, and employees bring prior work experiences with them to their current work in small firms. It is the organizational context, the resource limitations, and structural variations that influence the choice of action that actors select in small firms.

Nevertheless, researchers reacting to the neoinstitutional perspective suggest that the choices available to actors, and the ways that actors make decisions about their responses to organizational and environmental demands, requires a greater focus on the individual. According to Fligstein (2001:107), “New institutionalism theories emphasize that existing rules and resources are the constitutive building blocks of social life. I want to add that the ability of actors to skillfully use rules and resources is part of the picture as well.” Accordingly, the new institutionalism perspective has been criticized as portraying actors as oversocialized and acting in conditioned ways (Fligstein 2001).

In response to the growing popularity of the new institutionalism perspective, there was a call for researchers to “bring the individual back in” (Kilduff and Krackhardt 1994). Some scholars suggested that new institutionalism’s emphasis on structure moved organizational research to depend too deeply on a macro perspective to explain the way firms were organized, as well as the activities of organizational members. In response, researchers sought to emphasize the individual in order to link structure to a micro focus. Thus, researchers began to integrate concepts from cognitive psychology (see Hodgkinson and Healey 2008 for a review) and social cognition (see Zerubavel 1997 for a review) to explore the ways that macro-structures influence a variety of micro-level processes, such as patterns of communication in organizations (Boden 1994) and identity construction (Cerulo 1997).

The move to link extra-local values and macro structures to micro processes serves as a better framing for understanding the work of small firms. However, this perspective still assumes a top-down approach and primarily emphasizes macro-level pressures on the individual. Although neoinstitutionalism can offer some insights to help us understand how organizational actors choose different sets of actions given the structural and resource constraints of the firms they work in, this perspective is too limited to provide a robust approach to analyze the way small firms persevere with limited structure or formal processes. A framework that focuses more on actor agency and the ongoing group negotiation process is needed to better understand how order is created in small firms.

Institutional Logics

Despite macroinstitutionalism's inclusion of some focus on the individual, neoinstitutionalism is understood as emphasizing external institutional pressures (Meyer and Rowan 1977), representing organizations as passive entities, and actors within those organizations as institutional "carriers" (Scott 2003) of logics that they enact rather blindly. The institutional logics perspective attempts to integrate concerns for actor cognition by identifying a variety of different logics that provide guiding principles upon which actors can take action. This perspective further develops the idea that cognition can help bridge the macro-micro divide, responding to some of the limitations of neoinstitutionalism and its emphasis on a top-down, structural approach to understanding actor choices.

Institutional logics link individual agency and cognition with socially constructed institutional practices and rule structures (Thornton and Ocasio 2008). Originally

developed by Friedland and Alford (1991) to explore the interrelationships between individuals, organizations and society, institutional logics provide a sense of order, practices and symbols to actors. These logics are defined as socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, assumptions, values and beliefs by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their daily activities (Thornton and Ocasio 1999:51). Friedland and Alford (1991) initially proposed seven “ideal type” institutional logics (including capitalist market, bureaucratic state, democracy, nuclear family, and Christianity), revised to six by Thornton (2004) (the market, the corporation, the professions, the state, the family, and the religions) and then expanded by Thornton et al. (2012) to seven with the inclusion of the community. Each organizing logic has different sets of guiding principles that give actors vocabularies of motive. These institutional orders can be combined and represented by more specified organization-level logics or even industry-specific business logics.

Institutional logics work at several levels (society, industry, and individual) as an inter-institutional system (Thornton 2004) providing sources of legitimacy (Suchman 1995) and influencing individual and organizational behavior (Thornton et al. 2012). For example, the ways logics are formed, as well as their power in specific locations and at specific times, is affected by economic and political powers as well as by organizational- and individual-level forces. These different levels are embedded in one another (and therefore, affect one another), but the levels are also decomposable (Thornton 2004). Such an inter-related but decoupled system importantly suggests that different institutional logics may dominate particular organizations at the same or at different

times. This decoupling also suggests the partial autonomy of actors over social structures and the role of decision making. Conflicts in logics provide opportunities for actors and organizations to manipulate practices and symbols that in turn, provide meaning to organizational actors.

The institutional logics framework has led to interesting research in identifying large macroinstitutional shifts that influence industries, and in turn, those firms that operate within those institutional environments. Initial studies using the institutional logics perspective focused on conflict between logics, and how dominant institutional logics manifest themselves in organizational structures and practices (Glynn and Lounsbury 2005). For example, research on higher education publishing documented shifts from an editorial logic to a market logic affect the types of books that are published (Thornton and Ocasio 1999), while shifts from classical to nouvelle French cuisine have been studied for their effect on creating new role identities of chefs (Rao et al. 2003). A handful of studies have looked at fields where a single logic has not come to be dominant, such as in new industries or transitional phases of mature industries that experience exogenous shocks (e.g. Stark 2009). While much of the research on competing logics has focused on opposition between two logics, some research has focused on “institutional multiplicity,” or situations in which more than two logics compete for dominance. For example, Greenwood et al. (2010) look at the interplay between market, state and family logics in Spain.

While these different logics are typically discussed at the industry-level, they may help explain how order and stability are created at the organizational level as well. Logics provide commonly understood, coherent frames for conceptualizing organizational work.

Once organizational actors agree with an organizing performance, the firm's owners, managers and employees consider a firm's activities logical and legitimate. And with such cognitive legitimacy about a firm's operations, a business can generate order without formal processes.

Several organizational ethnographies have employed aspects of the institutional logics framework to investigate organizational-level behaviors. Zilber (2002) investigated a rape crisis center and the way new employees acted as carriers of new institutional meanings that challenged and reformed practices and the center's identity. In Turco's (2012) research of Motherhood, Inc., an organization that assists new mothers, she documents resistance from the company's own employees during its attempt to commercialize what was believed to be the realm of the personal, not of the market. In these examples, researchers have sought to demonstrate how differing logics, carried by organizational actors, influence the way that firms structure their activities, and in turn, influence actors' identity as organizational members.

One major shortcoming of the institutional logics perspectives is its lack of attention to how actors deal with conflicts at the micro level (Cloutier and Langley 2013). While the framework suggests that multiple institutional logics are available to actors, only some of them are accessible at any given time, depending on the situated nature of the actor. The framework provides little explanation of how institutional and cognitive tools are used by actors to instigate or resist external and internal pressure to change. In this way, the institutional logics framework can be seen through a top-down perspective,

like that of neoinstitutionalism, whereby it assumes that actors interpret the world in a predetermined way according to the dominant institutional logic.³

Although the institutional logics approach provides a perspective on firm order that integrates actor agency and recognizes how different logics may exist in the same context, it still suggests that logics are selected according to the influence of greater structural or extra-local contexts. Moreover, these logics provide sources of legitimacy for the way actors operate in their organizations because they are thought to provide set ways actors can make meaning. For example, anyone inside or outside a particular firm could assume the way a market logic approach would provide certain “meanings” to the way a firm operates. Similar to neoinstitutional theorists, the institutional logics approach suggests that actors are carriers of different logics that become enacted in different contextual or structure limitations. Even though there is room for variation in which logics become dominant, the institutional logics approach remains limited in its ability to explain both order and variation of small firms. Logics provide set meanings of what should be done. An institutional logics approach also provides a description of how a single logic may become dominant in an industry or a firm. However, it does not offer a perspective on the emergence of logics. Instead, a perspective that accounts for greater actor agency, recognizes and incorporates variation and nuance in firms, and links extra-local influences with firm-specific histories is needed to help us understand meaning-making and order among organizational actors in small firms.

³ In contrast, a somewhat similar theoretical perspective developed in France around the same time as the institutional logics perspective, known as the economics of worth worlds (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006) assumes actors can draw on elements from any “world” or logic, whenever there is disagreement over what is the right course of action to follow. Worthiness in economies of worth terms, is equivalent to legitimacy in institutional logics terms (Cloutier and Langley 2013:7)

Microinstitutionalism

Although the institutional logics perspective provides a framework for researchers to link multiple levels of analysis to evaluate industry-level and organizational-level dynamics and contestation of logics, microinstitutionalists seek to call specific attention to the reality that institutions are inhabited by people, “doing things together” (Becker 1986). Microinstitutionalism’s analysis begins at the point of interaction, assuming a bottom up approach. Rather than treating institutions as having some sort of macro cultural logic, decoupled from social interaction, as aspects of new institutionalism is sometimes interpreted, or emphasizing the interplay of various cognitive categories influencing institutions as in institutional logics, microinstitutionalism focuses on the way micro-processes influence organizational activity. A microinstitutional perspective can account for variations in firms with its focus on the ways social interactions in organizations can produce order and stability. Its attention to actors creating meaning together through ongoing interactions corrects the limitations of neoinstitutionalism and institutional logics approaches, which assume a top-down focus on structural constraints, and emphasize the enactment of already conceptualized lines of action or legitimizing logics.

This does not mean, however, a move towards individual agency per se (which can lead to essentializing actors and attention on psychology), but a focus on interaction and meaning making between individuals. Beliefs and values are shared—culture is not located in the mind of individuals, but situated within broader institutional processes (Hallett 2003). This perspective emphasizes the influence of the external environment on organizations, as well as on individuals, (as neoinstitutionalism and institutional logics

do) and seeks to understand structural constraints and opportunities that effect actors' activities. However, a micro process perspective emphasizes culture and the local production of meanings.

Although social relations in society at large influence actors, a microinstitutionalism analysis is situated within actor interactions and ongoing meaning creation within small groups (Stolte et al. 2001). The environments in which an organization resides—the political economy, the industry, and the community—all play a significant role in the way that individuals operate within that organization. Each of these extra-local contexts within which an organization is embedded, come with their own logics and meanings. But in contrast to prior work on institutionalism, which emphasizes macro cultural logics and meanings, we must understand how these logics operate *in practice* in organizations. Thus, while institutional logics carry meaning, meaning also arises through social interactions, which “are the beating heart of institutions” (Hallett and Ventresca 2006). Since culture creation is the outcome of actor interactions in organizations (Fine 1979), the emphasis of the microinstitutional perspective is on culture, how culture forms, the products and practices of culture, and how it becomes linked to small groups.

In his research on the implementation of new procedures and policies at a high school, Hallett (2010) raises the significance of individual actors by suggesting that external organizing myths of the school became recoupled with the actual activities of teachers. He extends neoinstitutionalism's interest in macro-cultural myths by identifying how meaning evolves in local interactions. In doing so, this recoupling resulted in “turmoil,” which Hallett suggests displaced meanings and expectations previously held.

He calls this recoupling “inhabited institutionalism” (Hallett and Ventresca 2006) and emphasizes that work and institutional myths structure organizations—in doing so, he focuses on individual agency and interaction, with a concern of what people do together (Hallett 2010). Hallett (2003) suggests that, organizational culture is not derived from structure, but emerges from practice and interaction. Thus, inhabited institutionalism, and microinstitutionalism more generally, is distinguished from institutional logics in its focus on the way individuals make meaning of logics during ongoing activities in groups. Structures are developed out of interactions, rather than interactions directed by existing structures.

What Hallett suggests is that organizational actors are influenced by a variety of concepts, or logics, as well as environmental factors, which they must make sense of in practice, through working together, within the context of the organization in which they work. Hallett and Ventresca (2006) suggest that while institutions provide raw materials and guidelines for social interactions, the meanings of institutions are constructed and propelled forward by social interactions. What is emphasized here is the critical interplay between the local and extra-local embeddedness and the local and extra-local meanings (Hallett and Ventresca 2006).

Fine and Fields (2008) suggest that microsituations, or small groups, are arenas of action where culture is produced and experienced. This focus on interaction is derived from Blumer (1969), who argues that meaning derives from interaction, and culture is a set of shared understandings. Microsociology emphasizes the way culture is created in practice through interactions (Becker 1986) and negotiated conventions (Fine 1984). “This approach suggests that culture is established through the creation of tradition,

shared references, and customs within ongoing performances that organize and routinize interaction” (Fine and Fields 2008:134). Once established, cultural forms provide a means through which individuals recognize their groups as salient units and build affiliations with fellow participants. As members interact, the groups to which they belong develop cultural traditions. Group cultures incorporate traditions and routine practices that are tied to background knowledge, common values, group goals, and status systems, but also serve as a space in which new cultural items are created that complement previous traditions (Fine 2006). These characteristics of a group constitute the “normative culture” of the workplace (Knorr-Cetina 1999:106, from Fine 2006), or the set of expectations that provide a reference for understanding the meanings of group members as well as forms of appropriate behaviors. The larger social system of organized groups intersecting is known as the interaction order (Goffman 1983b). Thus, a study of the group cultures at the micro level can provide the basis for unpacking the workings of more macro concerns (Fine 2012).

A group’s culture also provides a cognitive and emotional structure, through which individuals can understand their collective pasts and plan for their shared futures (Fine and Fields 2008). Importantly, this approach emphasizes the historical circumstances and developments of the group, which contributes to the importance of understanding the localized and situated nature of group cultures. In his work, Fine uses the term *idiocultures* to identify the microcultures of small groups and the recognition of solidified meaning and perspective (Fine 1979, 2012). *Idioculture* is defined as, “a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction. Members

recognize they share experiences in common and these experiences can be referred to with the expectation that they will be understood by other members, and further can be employed to construct a social reality” (Fine 1979). In these small groups, individuals share collective memories and action patterns.

The values of these groups are created from historical responses and ongoing interactions. Idioculture researchers argue that group cultures do not derive merely from cognition, speech, institutional pressures or structures, but is produced by a wide range of actions and interventions by members. Microsociologists contend that any group has access to a combination of background culture (the known culture of a group), the moral standards of discourse (the usable culture), the instrumental goals that culture is to achieve—intentionally or not—(the functional culture), and the status hierarchy (the appropriate culture). Group members reference this set of historically developed and dynamic cultural meanings in order to make sense of their ongoing activities and their interactions with group members. Groups do not exist in a content free context, but are continuously engaged in the construction of social reality, a history, and a sense of meaning. Group members draw from their access to shared experiences to perpetuate the group and encourage solidarity—both of which are necessary in order for organizational work to be accomplished.

Importantly, local cultural themes also shape group identity, as well as individuals’ self-image. Group or occupational identities affect the way in which individuals perform their work. Groups with similar tasks can identify themselves differently, based on alternative identities that different groups may exhibit. For example, in his research on two meteorology offices, Fine (2006) finds that workers at one office

called themselves doctors, despite not having PhDs, and sometimes wore white lab coats to emphasize this identity. The image of being an academic scientist, which stems back to when the office was located at a prestigious university, is central to the staff's identity. While most of their work constitutes bureaucratic and routine activities, they imagine themselves as experimentalists, contributing to their identities as scientists. This sense of experimental freedom also contributed to their low levels of respect for authority. Prior historical circumstances influenced the culture of the office, providing meanings for the way that the meteorologists interacted with each other and the way they formed their work identities. In contrast, a second meteorology office Fine studied in the same geographic area, did not identify as scientists, and instead ordered themselves according to a bureaucratic logic. They did not consider themselves to be experimentalists nor did they refer to themselves as doctors. The different history of these offices and the ongoing interactions results in quite distinct idiocultures and occupational identities, despite the fact that the actual work to be completed was quite similar.

As Fine does in his work, Hallett (2003:130) defines organizational culture as “a negotiated order that emerges through the interactions between actors, a negotiated order influenced in particular by people with symbolic power—the power to define the situation in which interactions take place.” These relations are ultimately dependent upon the agreement of relations that are constructed through a social, rather than a policy-driven process (Fine 1984). Thus, regardless of how stable an organization may seem from a distance, individuals in the organization must re-enact relations and agreements of power. The meaning associated with the culture is dependent on their agreements. In this sense, organizational culture is a “negotiated order” (Strauss 1978, from Hallett 2003). In

this negotiated order, practices and interactions propel structures forward, but also provide opportunity for structures to modify in the process (Hallett and Ventresca 2006 citing Scully and Creed 1997). Thus, while neoinstitutionalist researchers have emphasized that structure shapes action, a microinstitutionalism approach suggests that this structural shaping operates through the understandings and preferences of social actors. Even the constraints and opportunities institutions offer to actors must be organized through an interaction order (Goffman 1983a). In such an analysis, action, meanings, authority, inequality, organizations, and institutions have their roots in microprocesses and small group cultures (Fine 2012).

Summary

In many respects, a study of small businesses lends itself to a microsociological study of small groups. Small businesses have defined boundaries with organizational goals and objectives, in which all owners, managers, and employees regularly interact with each other. Small businesses are clearly impacted by environmental shifts, including industry-wide changes and more macro-level economic, political, social, and demographic shifts. Small businesses have histories and stories of their births and growth. In many respects, such histories have an important and strong influence over the culture of the business, how processes develop in firms, and the way business decisions are made. Finally, as a negotiated order, small businesses constitute an ideal environment to explore ongoing interactions, claims to legitimacy, and the ongoing construction of symbolic power in creating social order. By their very definition, small businesses have few numbers of interacting members who can all be observed as they recreate and alter

their small group culture on a daily bases, situated within their shared histories and influenced by local and extra-local pressures. By researching small firms through a microinstitutional lens, I investigate how order is created without traditional structures and procedures that management scholars assume are required for organizational stability.

Data

Field Site Selection

In this dissertation, I focus on businesses that in many respects have served as the backbone of America's economy. The small firms I research are not the "exciting" high-tech companies composed of a handful of 20-somethings fiercely dedicated to a new niche market and pursuing venture capital funding, nor are my research sites in the fast-past world of a small investment banking firm where machismo, networks and huge financial risk organize the work of a few dozen employees. Academic researchers as well as popular business authors often overlook the types of organizations I explore. Yet the vast majority of American workers do not spend their days in sexy companies—the economic impact of small businesses in health care, manufacturing, retail, and agriculture, among other industries, accounts for a far larger portion of America's job growth and GDP.

Far from humdrum, the owners and employees of the organizations I research are involved in a vast number of complex activities, from legal matters to technology challenges, employee retention to customer satisfaction. Small businesses are distinct because of their limited resources—they're short on financial capital, employee skills, and social connections. Such constraints make the daily operations of these businesses

often high-risk, intense, and extraordinarily mentally and physically demanding, requiring highly dexterous individuals to navigate the intricacies of a multitude of responsibilities. While the organizations I focus on can be categorized as members of slow-technology industries, which include sectors from factory-created parts to apparel (Berger 2005), these firms pursue strategies of growth through non-technological innovation. In order to accomplish organizational change with limited financial, social, and human resources, this research aims to understand the micro-level processes that create order. Through this cultural analysis, I believe the dissertation's findings suggest ways in which small businesses generate order to explain firm stability, as well as change in the pursuit of firm growth.

Defining “Small Business” In This Study

The SBA's broad definition of small business includes everything from the self-employed (those with no employees) to organizations with 500 employees.⁴ However, it does not seem reasonable to group organizations with such size and resource differences together.⁵ As initially described in Chapter 1, in this dissertation I focus on organizations with payrolls of less than fifty full- or part-time employees.⁶ Within the United States,

⁴ In the United States, the Small Business Administration (SBA) Standards Office applies different standards to each Federally-classified industry to reflect industry differences, and small business status may be determined by assets or net profits, and not only number of employees.

⁵ In the Survey of Business Owners (SBO), part of the 2007 Economic Census, firms without employees accounted for approximately 10.5 million cases, or 71.3% of represented firms (Census 2007). Thus, it is estimated that about three-quarters of all U.S. businesses have no payroll. Most are self-employed persons operating unincorporated businesses, and may or may not be the owner's principle source of income. However, non-employers accounted for only 3.4% of business receipts, so they are often not included in most business statistics, including most reports from the Economic Census. The daily concerns of someone working from a desk in his or her basement are vastly different from the way a 150-person office operates.

⁶For readers who are concerned with the potential impact of Obamacare on small businesses, the new health care law requires businesses with 50 or more full-time employees to provide health care options to

96.3% (approximately 5.5 million) of all businesses with payroll have fewer than fifty employees, accounting for 28.1% (approximately 31.5 million) of all employed workers (SBA 2010).

In addition to organizational size, we must consider organizational operations. For example, Scase and Goffee (1980:24-25) delineate small businesses by company size and owner responsibility, developing four categories: the self-employed (those who work for themselves without formal employees), small employers (those who work alongside their workers and undertake the administrative and managerial tasks of running their own business), owner-controllers (those who do not work alongside their employees but are solely responsible for administration and management of their businesses), and owner-directors (who control enterprises with developed managerial hierarchies). I found through my contacts with multiple companies of fifty employees or less, that organizational operations can be described by Scase and Goffee's two intermediate categories, the small employers and the owner-directors. The self-employed have no employees, and thus fail to provide a valid case to investigate small groups. Owner-directors' organizations would constitute businesses with more than 50 employees that would likely necessitate managerial hierarchies and not require business owners to have a direct hand in working daily with his or her employees and engage in general firm operations on a regular basis.

In addition to the narrow definition of small businesses I use in this study—organizations with fifty or fewer employees in which owners have daily responsibility for major firm activities, including work production itself and administrative and managerial

their employees. In this study, I focus on organizations that are currently not affected by the new law, although I will touch upon implications for organizational growth given the new law.

tasks—even more specifically I focus on firms that I label “small enterprising businesses.” This concept is akin to Carland et al.’s (1984a) definition of “entrepreneurial venture.” Carland et al. (1984b:358) define entrepreneurial ventures by the firm’s engagement in innovative behaviors, whereas small businesses are defined as extensions of the personality of the owners, and bound by owner needs and desires. The four firms I discuss in this dissertation can all be described as entrepreneurial or enterprising small businesses. Throughout the dissertation I will use the term “small enterprising firms” or “small enterprising business” to identify firms that are pursuing growth and innovation, and I will use the term “small business” or “small firms” when referring to the broader definition of small business and entrepreneurial ventures defined by the SBA.

Field Site Selection

The process of business selection for study was conducted through a deliberate, theoretical sampling plan (Eisenhardt 1989) rather than through random or systematic sampling that would be inappropriate for such a small number of cases. The final collection of companies researched in this study was selected according to “planned opportunism” (Pettigrew 1990:274). Specific organizational variables drove my pursuit to gain access to particular types of businesses, although the final set of companies that appear in this study were based on geographic accessibility, the kindness of organizational gatekeepers, and luck.

Economic Sector and Industry Selection

Site selection began by narrowing the particular industry sectors to investigate. The three major industry sectors, as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, include: goods-producing; service-providing; and agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting. Within these major sectors, I refined my industry search to those that are currently experiencing economic fluctuations, both those that are the fastest growing as well as those that are rapidly declining. Such diversity would allow me to investigate how macro-level economic impacts may affect business strategies. The industries I focused on are: manufacturing, retail, health care and social assistance, and agriculture. Because service-providing is the largest economic sector in the United States (in terms of employment and output [BLS 2012]), I selected two industries within this category—retail and health care. Furthermore, I selected one industry that involved the sale of goods (i.e. retail) and one that involved the sale of a service (i.e. health care). The data presented below under each industry provide an overview of the impact of these industries in the US economy, as well as their projected growth or decline.⁷

Farming

About 2.2 million people, or less than 1% of all people in the US claim farming as an occupation (EPA 2013). The U.S. Census recognizes any establishment that produced and sold \$1000 or more agricultural products during the year as a farm. Less than one in four farms produce gross revenue in excess of \$50,000. According to the 2007 Census of

⁷ Farm and nonfarm economic census data are collected by the U.S. government separately according to somewhat different criteria. Thus, nation-wide farm data is provided by different government sources than nonfarm industry data.

Agriculture, 87% are owned and operated by individuals or families. Among eight types of farm categories, five are listed under the umbrella title of “small family farms,” which includes farms with sales less than \$250,000. The residential/lifestyle farm is the largest percentage of farm type of small family farm, including 36.4% of all farms (representing 801,844 farms; USDA 2007).

Although recent popular trends in local food production and sourcing, as well as a steady rise in the number of farms participating in community supported agriculture (CSA; from just two in 1986 to 12,500 in 2007 [U.S. Agricultural Census 2007]), suggest that farming is on the rise, both self-employed agricultural farms, as well as wage and salary earners, are estimated to decline over the next ten years by an estimated annual rate of 0.7 % (BLS 2012).

Retail, Healthcare and Manufacturing

Table 1 shows some detailed data about the three nonfarm industries selected for my study. Data were collected from organizations with payroll, and taken from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Survey of Business Owners (SBO 2007). The SBO includes organizations of all sizes, including those with over five hundred employees. The industries I focus on are among the most significant in the United States when considering the number of firms in existence, the number of individuals they employ, and their annual payroll. When compared with the full sample of organizations in the SBO, organizations with fewer than fifty employees in retail, healthcare and manufacturing account for more than 25% of all firms, 21% of all employees, and 20% of all annual payrolls. These substantial numbers suggest the value of sampling small firms in these industries.

Table 1: U.S. Retail, Health Care and Manufacturing Industry Firms with Less Than Fifty Employees

	Firms	Employees	Annual Payroll (\$1000s)
Total (all SBO respondents)*	5,523,360	31,470,230	\$1,133,493,017
Retail	622,517	2,967,779	\$72,877,070
Health Care and Social Assistance	567,761	3,141,908	\$135,185,208
Manufacturing	210,331	527,938	\$22,346,953

Adapted from the Survey of Business Owners (SBO), 2007 Economic Census, which includes a sample of more than 2.3 million nonfarm businesses filing 2007 tax forms as individual proprietorships, partnerships or any type of corporation and with receipts of \$1000 or more. Data was collected from 14.8 million businesses, or 54.5% of all nonfarm firms.

Note: All numbers above represent businesses with payroll.

*The total amount of SBO respondents with payroll from all nonfarm industries, not just those in this chart.

Both health care and retail industries are among the top service-providing industries projected to grow over the next ten years. In fact, health care and retail are among the top twenty industries expected to see employment growth (BLS 2012), and they currently stand at a close third and fourth respectively as the top U.S. service-providing employers (behind state and local government, and professional and business services employment; [BLS 2012]). In addition, home health care and services is listed as the number one industry with the fastest growing wages (with an annual rate of 6.1%), and retail trade is projected to experience some of the highest annual change in outputs of any industry (with an annual rate increase of 3.7%; BLS 2012).

On the other hand, despite an uptick in manufacturing employment and output since the 2008 recession, manufacturing is projected to continue its general trend of decline since the 1970s. BLS has included many industries within the manufacturing

sector, and lists metalworking, computer equipment, basic chemical, and fiber and yarn among those projected to experience the greatest decline in jobs, output and pay (BLS 2012).

Firm Selection

Despite the differences between each of the economic sectors and industries, I sought specific organizations with key similarities. First, to fit the small enterprising business criteria set out in this study, firms had to have fewer than fifty full- or part-time employees at the start of my observations. In addition to my theoretical assumptions previously described, I believed that this small firm size would allow me access to nearly all aspects of the organization (from managers and personnel to customer to firm-specifics documents). This access would not only provide me with rich detail from many different sides of the organization, but also enable me to triangulate observations between different organizational actors. Second, because of the industries I selected to investigate, the employees at these organizations are typically low-skilled and often racial-ethnic minorities and immigrants (Camarota 2012). This critical similarity between the employees at these organizations would allow me to analyze if racial-ethnic and socio-economic differences between managers and employees affect the organizational culture and the implementation and enforcement of procedures and protocols. Finally, each of these organizations needed to actively engage in growth strategies in order to be defined as enterprising. Although the strategies of each firm were developing at different paces, the active desire and activity engagement toward growth was a significant part of the owners' and managers' ongoing decision-making about their firms.

Although each organization fit my definition of small enterprising business, each firm had a number of unique organizational variations. Organizations that can be identified as having strong category differences provide the opportunity for evidence to be challenged, enhancing interval validity (Pettigrew 1990). Likewise, similarities found between seemingly different firms will bolster an argument for greater external validity (Eisenhardt 1989). I tried to maximize variation based on some set of clear criteria well developed in the literature. For example, traditional theoretical models of small business success have considered factors such as type of employees, type of sales, family ownership, education level of owner, and age of owner (Fairlie and Robb 2008). Such modeling relies on categories developed in data collection instruments like the SBO Economic Census. In the 2007 SBO Economic Census, for example, small business respondents are characterized and distinguished by the following criteria:

Full and Part-Time Employees: 75.4% had full time paid employees and 58.0% had part-time employees.

Type of Sales: 72.2% of firms reported that sales to individuals accounted for at least 10% of total sales, while 35.5% of firms reported sold to other businesses and organizations accounted for at least 10% of total sales.

Family Ownership: More than one-third (36%) of respondent firms were family-owned.

Education Level of Owners: More than two-thirds (67.8%) completed at least some college education at the time they started or acquired the business, with over a quarter (26.4%) achieving a BA and 18.5% receiving a Master's, doctorate or other professional degree before starting or acquiring their business.

Age of Owners: More than one-third (36.5%) of owners were 55 or older, while 31.7% were 25-44 years old.

Given these significant characteristics and their putative potential to influence organizational decision-making, practices and overall success, I sought organizations that

varied along these features. Figures 1 to 5 (in the Appendix) depict how the organizations selected for this study match up with each other along continuums for each variable listed above. Figures 6 to 12 identify additional key organizational characteristics and the differences between the four organizations researched. These figures show the ways the organizations selected vary, allowing for analysis of distinctive issues faced by each organization.

In the following chapter, I discuss ethnographic research and the data collection process for this study. I then take a first pass (Morrill 1996) at describing each of the field sites studied in this dissertation, including: how I acquired access to these sites, my role in each business, a physical description of each setting, the key informants, and an overview of the culture at each small enterprising firm.

Chapter 3: Method and Field Site Descriptions

Method

People make meaning in relation to one another, as they perceive one another in their roles, affiliations, and responsibilities (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). As people make meaning within small groups, cultures are created. These small group cultures, or idiocultures (Fine 1979), generate order. Within the context of small firms, they enable productive business operations. Through an investigation of the ways actors interpret and create meanings through group interactions, we can see the ways that local and extra-local embeddedness, local and extra-local meanings, group histories and individual experiences, culminate to produce (and reproduce) organizational cultures.

Small group cultures are not located in the minds of individuals, but situated within broader institutional processes. Thus, while the ethnographer can observe local action, it is argued that these observations transcend the uniqueness of the setting. “The horizontal comparison of scenes, coupled with the ability to see processes operating on vertical levels, links local action to societal effects,” revealing “how local action becomes linked to social order” (Fine 2012:6). This generalizability of social processes provides the basis upon which comparisons can be made between different organizations, as well as between the organization and the extra-local environmental in which it operates. Ethnography offers the opportunity for the discovery of mechanisms that contribute to shaping organizations by exploring culture *as group practice* (Fine 2012:6) or *in interaction* (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003:737).

Although a handful of organizational ethnographies have been conducted in the United States, where researchers have worked inside firms to understand how businesses

operate on the ground, most qualitative organizational research is done at a distance. Instead of daily involvement with commercial activities and firm employees, researchers have relied on formal and informal interviews along with sporadic attendance at company meetings or events to conduct their studies (e.g. Kanter 1977, Morrill 1995, Ram 1999). Since Dalton's (1959) *Men Who Manage*, ethnographic research on businesses has usually focused on specific businesses (e.g. Van Maanen's [1991] work at Disneyland) or on a focused aspect of specific industries, such as: corporate attempts at cultural management and personal identity in the hi-tech world of computer engineers (Kunda 1992), power relations between authors, publishers and editors in academic publishing (Cosser et al. 1982), the practices and relationships between service workers and guests of luxury hotels in the normalization of inequality (Sherman 2007), the skill of organizing, compromising and managing time and space in restaurants (Fine 1996), the perpetuation of social inequality among employees and between employees and customers at children's toy stores (Williams 2006), and the cultural practices, values, and sensibilities of Wall Street investment banks and their influence on corporate America (Ho 2009). These organizational ethnographies have uncovered important social complexities and relationships within different industries, as well as fluctuations of cultural meanings and power dynamics within single organizations. However, none has explicitly focused on small businesses.

The few ethnographic studies of small businesses have come out of Europe, primarily from the UK. Research to date has primarily explored the nature of employment relations (Ram 1994; Ram 1996; Holliday 1995), often concentrating on low-skilled manufacturing (Goffee and Scase 1995). Some ethnographers sought to

categorize ownership and management styles of small businesses (Scase and Goffee 1980) or identify shared values in small firms (Haugh and McKee 2004). The ethnography reported in this dissertation includes an investigation of employment relations, values, and management styles, among other themes, but positions these factors within the broader concern of how small firms generate order. By working at four field sites alongside my research subjects, I am able to discover the actual activities that lead to the development and the maintenance of small business cultures.

Data Collection

In each of the four small businesses I investigated, described in this chapter, I collected data over a period of about 18 months. I spent one or two days a week at each firm. I kept a regular weekly work schedule for a period of six months, and then alternated that schedule, taking away a day at one firm and adding a day at another firm, or altering the days of the week that I worked at each firm. By observing routine work activities on different days, I was able to evaluate variations in weekly work rhythms. In fact, differences in patterns of work did exist on different workdays or when different collections of part-time employees were working. I also made adjustments to my work schedule when an organization required more of my time during important firm activities—such as the lead up to AeroGears' AS9100 accreditation or the set-up and crazed work at the Thorny Rose during the Valentine's Day holiday. Altering my schedule to accommodate particularly important organizational events provided me the opportunity to be a part of, and to document, critical firm activities.

My primary data were field notes I wrote each day about my work experiences. Since my work at two field sites (ElderCare and AeroGears) was almost exclusively performed on a computer, and my work at a third site (Thorny Rose) was often on a computer, I was in an ideal position to write field notes “in real time” while events were unfolding. This enabled me to capture a high number of details since I was able to actively look around my environment and describe activities without having to commit them to memory and get them down on the page later. It also provided me the opportunity to document conversations verbatim to give a highly accurate account of interactions that took place. For my work at Rolling Hills, as well as during times I was not in front of a computer at my other sites, I always kept scrap paper and a pen in my pocket. I would often jot down verbatim conversations, as well as notes about interactions I believed were important, and ideas I had about events that I wanted to remember to write more about later.

During the long commute between my field sites and my home, I often dictated impressions I took away from that day’s activities into a digital voice recorder in an effort to minimize the time between the activities of the workday and recalling the details of those events. In this way I was able to maximize the accuracy of details from my workday. Once at home each evening, I prepared a quick dinner, made some coffee, and sat down in front of my computer to document my day in writing. I wrote everything that I could recall from the day’s activities, reviewing jottings I captured throughout that day, and then reviewing dictations I made on the car ride home. Typical writing time each evening was between three and five hours, depending on how many events and ideas I

was able to capture in writing during the day (when I was in front of a computer) at my field sites.

In addition to intense observations at my field sites, I engaged in repeated, informal interviews with most organizational members at each field site. On a weekly basis, I asked my co-workers about their thoughts and sentiments of their daily work and the work of their colleagues and supervisors, as well as non-business discussions about current events and weekend plans. I also conducted formal interviews (which lasted between 30 minutes and two hours) with all the owners and managers at each field site, as well as many of the employees. Most of the interviews were conducted one-on-one at each field sites. However, because non-office staff employees at ElderCare performed their work in the homes of clients, it was more challenging to commit them to make a special office visit for an interview—although I successfully got a few of them to make an extra office trip for an interview. Since some workers did not own vehicles and needed transportation from the closest bus or train stop to the clients' home, I volunteered on several occasions to drive aides the final leg of their trip, conducting formal interviews with aides in my car.

Some of the formal interviews I completed were digitally recorded and transcribed, but many were not. For example, employees at AeroGears were explicit that they did not want to be recorded (and I will discuss how this is a reflection on the organization's culture in the next chapter). I also found, as other qualitative researchers have (Morrill 1996), that interviewees seem to be reserved when a recording device is around. When I did not use a digital recorder, interviewees seemed to be more relaxed and open up more in our conversations. Thus, I typically chose to forgo use of the

recorder. Because many of the formal interviews I conducted also took place during regular business hours, I often left an interviewee's office with copious notes, and immediately went to my computer to write up as much of the conversation as I could remember. Again, minimizing the time between conversations and the write-up helped ensure accuracy of the verbal exchanges.

Although field notes and transcriptions of informal and formal interviews served as the most significant data used to investigate the question of how small enterprising businesses create order, additional data were gathered and analyzed. I saved email exchanges between myself and fellow workers, I gathered internal organizational documents including marketing materials, employee and operations manuals, and samples of client contracts, among other circulated documents. In addition, I conducted informal interviews with other business owners and managers in the industries I investigated, as well as several informal interviews with firms' customers. Finally, I regularly read and gathered data from industry journal publications to keep abreast of extra-local industry changes that may impact the decision-making and strategies of the firms I worked for. This additional data helped provide context for the firm in relation to its industry, providing support (or contradiction) for some of the strategy conversations I was a part of in each organization.

Data Analysis

Throughout the data collection period, I kept a personal reflection journal separate from my field notes. In this journal, I jotted down thoughts about events I observed, how I understood my position in each business, and patterns of interactions I noticed each week. These journals became part of my data and served to help me develop an initial

collection of themes, or codes, that regularly appeared in my field notes. As I developed an understanding of my field sites, the number of codes grew to about 85. These codes served as the basis for organizing my data and worked as a tool to help me develop a theory of how order is generated in small firms.

The field notes, transcribed interviews, internal firm documents, and a variety of industry journal publications were scanned and uploaded into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program. Approximately six months into data collection, I began the slow process of coding my data using the initial list of 85 themes I generated. Once I completed collecting data and the initial round of coding was finished, I reevaluated the coded data to look for potential second-order coding schemes (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Gioia et al. 2013), or logical ways in which the some codes could be collapsed into broader categories. In this way, I moved from a collection 85 codes to 22. From this more inclusive categorization, I reviewed the data once again, coding portions of field notes and interviews that fit within these more comprehensive categories.

Having first developed a close connection to my work and the employees and owners of the firms I studied for a year and a half, I now developed a close connection with the data and the organization of categories I developed. From this point in the process, I began writing the dissertation. I continuously reflected upon and worked back and forth between my writing and the data, assuming an induction, deduction, and validation approach to analyzing the data (Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1998). As I wrote, I moved themes, ideas and stories around between different chapters in order to both stay true to my informants and my own experiences, as well as to tell a thoughtful and engaging story about the way small firms generate order.

My Perspective as an Employee

I emphasize my position in these organizations as an employee because of the access it provided me to organizational members, firm activities, and to personal experiences that I could reflect upon and compare with the experiences told to me by my informants. To be precise in my personal experiences, the work that I was engaged in was primarily the work that managers at these organizations performed. But because these organizations were small, and resources (including human capital) were limited, many of the daily responsibilities and the work of managers overlapped the work of employees (i.e. aligning with Scase and Goffee's (1980) small employers definition discussed in Chapter 2). Even when managers' work did not overlap with employees, my supervisors were always aware of the academic reasons I was at their businesses. Thus, when my regular "management" work was slow, I was asked to assist with non-traditional management work. For example, I worked alongside the owner of Rolling Hills to help set prices of produce for sale to local restaurants in the early morning (while no other farmhands assisted in this process), and then picked kale in the late morning with the other farmhands. At AeroGears, while I primarily worked with blueprints to ensure proper documentation of constructed parts, I was also regularly asked to print labels when the employees in shipping needed help, or I was told to measure the cuts of some machined parts if a machinist needed his work double checked.

Although most employees held low-skilled positions, there were a variety of work activities I could not participate in because I did not have the proper training or certifications needed. For example, I was not a Certified Home Health Aide, and I could not take care of any clients myself (although I met several clients during consultation

visits with ElderCare owner). I also did not have the experience to operate any machinery at AeroGears. However, at both Thorny Rose and Rolling Hills, I performed all jobs that other employees completed, from de-thorning roses and making deliveries, to crafting bouquets and boutonnieres, harvesting tomatoes and shoveling manure, to evaluating a potential goat purchase and milking cows.

Nevertheless, it is fair to say that my research and daily interactions were often from the perspective of managers and owners, their regular work activities, and their work alongside employees. Previous research on organizations (primarily large organizations) has typically focused on employees and the creation of subcultures among employees, such as manufacturing plant workers (e.g. Burawoy 1979; Roy 1959) or customer service employees (Sherman 2007). Often, this research does not address the employees' ongoing relationship with their supervisors and organization managers. Although this may be a consequence of organizational size, even ethnographers researching small businesses seem to gravitate to the work of "the regular employees" rather than that of the managers (Holliday 1995).

Some small business ethnographies, notably the work of Monder Ram and colleagues, focus research on small business owners and managers, but explicitly centers on employment relations (Ram 1996; Ram 1999; Ram 2001; Ram et al. 2001). While such research includes discussions of the ways that employers and employees negotiate their work and their autonomy, this line of research assumes contestation between those in authority positions and the average worker. Most importantly, these researchers do not develop an interactionist or cultural perspective to understand social relations within the firms they investigate. Instead, they assume a pre-existing power asymmetry between

employer and employee that cannot be bridged, setting the stage for the interactions to follow.

I find that the daily work and ongoing affiliations between employers and employees in small businesses is both reaffirmed and challenged by a variety of organizational actors with different levels of social capital and symbolic authority. While contention certainly existed at times between employers and employees, and those in structural authority asserted their power at certain times, it could not be taken for granted that managers and owners were always in charge of their staff and their organization's activities. I believe that working alongside firm managers and owners provided me a unique and important understanding of the relationship between organizational members, challenging some of the assumptions of power dynamics that previous researchers of small business have taken for granted.

The close connections I formed with managers did not come without some limitation on my data collection and perspective. For example, some of my personal reflection journals suggest that I shared in owners' and managers' frustrations with perpetually tardy employees and shoddy work. However, my reflections also demonstrated that I sympathized with the employee complaints about management and intense workloads. In addition, formal interviews proved useful in helping to provide me additional perspectives of the ways that different organizational players made sense of their work, themselves, and the organization in which they spent most of their waking hours, curbing some of my subjectivity. Moreover, the opportunity I had to detail events around me as they occurred because of my frequent work in front of a computer, and the

ongoing data analysis process (e.g. multiple passes of the data and progressive levels of theme discovery), enabled me to remain faithful to interviewees and their experiences.

Group Affiliations

My own experiences at these organizations as an employee play an important part in my interpretation and analysis of the data gathered. While my membership at these organizations was temporary and my motivation for providing a high level of work output was to maintain good relationships with my superiors so I could maintain organizations access, I frequently felt myself as a member of these small groups. I realized how much I became embedded in these group affiliations through small, often subconscious acts. I sometimes enacted an idiocultural normative practice at the wrong field site, leading to some questionable stares.

For example, one day while driving to work at ElderCare, I looked at my hands on the steering wheel and saw that my nails still had some lavender spray paint on them from the previous day's work at Thorny Rose—I sprayed Styrofoam crosses for gravesite arrangements. It did not seem to matter, since other employees at the florist came to work with dirtied clothes or paint on their hands that was difficult to scrub off. Often this meant someone was working late and “could not be bothered” with the minutia of being perfectly clean when he or she would just get dirty the next day. It had not clicked that I was not heading to Thorny Rose, but instead to ElderCare. It wasn't until I stepped into the ElderCare office that I finally realized that lavender spray-painted nails were inappropriate. But it was already too late. The office manager noticed the lavender and jokingly asked: “What were you up to last night?!” and laughed.

Another time, while I was at my desk at AeroGears, I let out a small, but audible fart. This would seem inappropriate for most workplaces, but at the Thorny Rose, bodily sounds and smells were often joked about. The siblings at the florist, especially the brothers, flatulated and joked about it on a regular basis. As I became increasingly comfortable at the Thorny Rose and gained a high level of acceptance among the group, I also participated in these gestures. However, as I sat in AeroGears and passed gas, I was about to laugh when I looked up from my computer and looked around to realize that this was not the group of people in which this behavior takes places. There was no joking or bonding over these activities. I covered my smile with my hand and I went about my work, hoping that others might believe the sound was just the squeaky drawer.

While all such “improper” events either went unnoticed or were minor, I recognized that such activities were demonstrations of the way I had truly become a group member at each of these firms.

Field Site Descriptions

The stage is now set to introduce the four small businesses that make up the empirical data analyzed in this dissertation. In the first pass I take at describing each field site below, I provide:

- *Executive Summary and History* – the organization’s goals, weekly activities, how it generates income, a brief history and description of the current organizational structure, an introduction of the key informants
- *Access* – the process of gaining access to the site
- *Responsibilities* – my daily work as an employee or volunteer
- *The Setting* - a description of the physical environment
- *The People* – a description of the organizational owners, leaders, and other key informants

Although I aim to provide a thorough description of each field site to prepare the reader for an analysis of how small firms generate order according to three organizing frames, the picture I draw of each business will unavoidably be limited. As Fine (2006:4) points out: “Inevitably in comparative ethnography, many more features differentiate groups than could be possibly described. Offices differ in their layouts, leadership style, [and] training procedures...Each of these features affects group culture.” Thus, in the descriptions below I cover what I believe to be some of the most critical aspects of each business, but it cannot be said that the portrayals are inclusive of all business aspects that influence how order is generated.

Rolling Hills

Executive Summary and History

Rolling hills is a 10 year old, 60 acre, organic farm, hosting a weekly on-site CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) for the past eight years, in which paying members come to the farm to collect a variety of freshly picked produce during the harvesting season (roughly June through November). CSA membership has been growing each year, and the quality of the produce distributed to members has improved, creating additional farming and sorting processes. The farm also sells fruits and vegetables at a local weekend farmer’s market as well as to local area restaurants. Lower quality produce is used to feed farm volunteers and is also canned for the winter. The farm maintains a small chicken pen (producing high quality eggs that the farm also sells all year to egg co-op members) as well as two dairy cows and six goats. Rolling Hills accepts volunteers

from around the country (and the world) who are required to perform daily farm work in exchange for housing and food.

Rolling Hills was founded by Penelope, who is in her mid-60s. She told me she initially started the farm to provide a space for the students of the Waldorf School to have a space to engage with nature. Penelope founded the Waldorf school which maintains about 150 students from kindergarten through grade eight. The small school is situated next door to the farm. The farm is part of a personal dream she had—she had spent some years on a farm as a child, and told me that she hoped to one day operate a farm of her own. Finally, she said she wanted to develop a farm as a way to connect to the local community.

The philosophy of Rudolf Steiner (a philosopher and educator from early 20th century Austria) serves as the basis for the Waldorf education (i.e. education at one's own pace and learning through engagement with the environment) as well as for a type of farming called biodynamics. The Steiner philosophy as farming practice is predicated upon the farm as a closed system, whereby the farm can be self-sustaining with each part of the farm supporting other parts. For example, uneaten (or inedible) produce serves as the feed for the chickens, cows, and goats. Manure from the cows and goats (in addition to rotten produce) help in the development of mulch. The mulch serves as the basis for planting initial seedlings, which are planted in the ground for the next season of growth. According to Penelope, the Steiner philosophy encourages people to generally see “the world as a good and beautiful place” and able to “naturally provide” everything we may need.

In addition to Penelope, her husband Ross (who is in his early 70s at the time of this writing) participated in the farm business, although he infrequently worked outside. Instead, Penelope said that he kept the books for the CSA membership and the egg coop, and made advertisements and mailings for the business. Filipe was the only full-time employee at the farm. He was an immigrant from Guatemala who aspired to own his own farm in Guatemala one day. Aiko is a volunteer who has worked on the farm for more than six months. Penelope deeply relies on Aiko, and she served as my primary informant at this field site. In addition to this cast, a variety of volunteers rotated in and out of the farm, staying from a week to several months. Most of the farmhands were college students who were interested in environmental issues, or who wanted to become farmers, like Aiko. Some college students simply wanted something to do for a few weeks during the summer and, “didn’t want to live at home with [their] parents,” as a few explained. Finally, there were always several farmhands from European countries, including France, Spain, and Portugal. These individuals said they came to primarily practice their English while getting “free” food and housing. Some European farmhands were receiving college credit for spending time on the farm. A few farmhands who were studying agriculture in school, hoped to learn more about biodynamic farming.

Most of the volunteers came to Rolling Hills, as opposed to other farms in the United States, because it is near a major northeast city. Penelope told me she advertised to students coming from abroad that she would routinely take them to public transportation so they could quickly get to the city—and she in fact provided them regular access to the train. During peak farming times in the spring and summer, especially when summer break began for college students, there may be a dozen

volunteers living in the house. During the slow season in late fall through the start of spring, there may be two or three volunteers living in the house. In addition, there were a few volunteers who helped out a day or two a week who did not live at the house—some of these individuals were looking to accumulate volunteering hours for college requirements, while a few were young stay-at-home mothers who sent their children to the Waldorf school. This collection of volunteers had large variations in agricultural experience, as well as their general interest in farming. These different motivations made it difficult at times for Penelope to motivate farmhands to complete the necessary work to maintain the farm.

Access

I found Rolling Hills by perusing the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) website, a website dedicated to posting volunteer opportunities on organic farms for part-time, seasonal or full-time work. In exchange for labor, farm owners typically provide food and housing. The description of Rolling Hills on the WWOOF website was written as follows:

“Farm consists of 60+ acres total, vegetable and fruit production in raised beds on approximately 5 acres (biointensive planting) woods, streams and pasture lands. We have three flocks of chickens which move over land in 'mobile homes', 6 goats now and two cows. We have a CSA, deliver produce to area health food store and restaurants during growing season June through October...Interns and volunteers participate in all aspects of work, sowing in greenhouse from February, transplanting, weeding, trellising, harvesting, etc. Marketing, compost making throughout year...Expect WWOOFERS to work at least 5 hours per day doing farm chores plus one hour helping to prepare meals and clean up...We are working with biodynamics and striving to become completely sustainable.”

I knew of this website from college friends who had positive experiences working on farms during their summer breaks. A few larger farms listed on this website offer

formal training opportunities to volunteers in caring for livestock or in the production of cheese, and require prospective volunteers to complete an extensive application demonstrating their prior experiences and desire for a career in agricultural work. However, most farms do not have such programs and typically look for individuals who simply want the experience of working on a farm, rather than pursuing a farming career. I was in email contact with several farms and visited three farms before settling on Rolling Hills.

Rolling Hills had a larger number of volunteers than the other farms I visited, and its owner, Penelope, had plans to grow her farm—a significant criteria for my field site selection. Penelope was also amenable to my primary goal of researching her farm and interacting with the other volunteers to collect data. She hoped that I could provide her some insights into the operations of her farm so that she could, “run this place better, since...I don’t make any money here.”

On my first full day of work at the farm, Penelope said to me: “So you’d like to study the farm and see how we work.” She said that WWOOFers in the past gave her suggestions for improving operations of the farm and she would “love to hear what you have to say...although I can’t pay you anything.” Penelope felt that the labor I put into the farm was fair exchange for food and housing, and anything beyond that, she felt, warranted a financial exchange. (This is a theme I will return to in Chapter 7).

Responsibilities

I was primarily involved with CSA preparation, which occurred once a week, on Wednesdays, during the CSA season. After spending almost two weeks at the farm as a

boarder, I then worked on the farm two days a week, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, staying at the house for one night. I helped with harvesting the crops and preparing and setting up displays for member collection. I also prepared crops for local restaurant pickup and assisted with pricing the yields. As part of my responsibilities as a farmhand, I assisted with cooking meals and cleaning the house. I visited local farms with Penelope when she evaluated the purchase of new livestock, and I also assisted in the preparation, service, and clean-up of several farm dinner fundraisers. When the CSA season ended, and the regular volunteers on the farm fell to about two or three, I spent one day a week at the farm, usually on Tuesdays. I collected data on the farm for two full CSA seasons.

The Setting

Rolling Hills is situated in a rural area of a suburban town, an hour and a half outside a major northeast city. There are about two dozen other farms of various sizes and uses in the area (from gentleman farms to a sprawling fourth generation goat farms). A long gravel driveway extends from the street up to the side of the house. A small sign for the farm is positioned at the edge of the drive. An uneven circular driveway and a sloped grassy area separates the farm from the school next door, providing parking for farmhands and CSA members. A large glass-walled space, which likely used to be a garage prior to the house being converted into a “farm house”, abuts the driveway. This space serves as the CSA pickup area. Inside this area are a large walk-in refrigerator for collected produce, a small certified organic kitchen (which was installed over the course of my data collection), and a storage area for bins and tables and assorted equipment. A door led from this space into the house.

The house always appeared unkempt. It was the responsibility of the farmhands to clean and maintain the common areas. Although it was in our “contracts” to clean, as a result of the revolving door of volunteers, cleaning was the first duty to suffer from a free rider problem. It was typically those individuals who worked at the farm the longest, notably Aiko, who took responsibility for keeping the house clean.

The first floor of the house was divided into a “men’s side” and “women’s side” (where boarders slept) with the kitchen separating the two quarters. The men’s side, generally had several mattresses and blown-up airbeds strewn about. Penelope told me that most of the volunteers are in their early 20s and so, “It’s more dorm-room like and a 30-year old [which I was] might not be as keen on it, so please let me know how you feel about the sleeping situation.” Penelope owned the twin mattresses, which were secured by farmhands who have taken up residence the longest. I brought my own blow-up twin mattress (which unfortunately had a small hole in it, since each morning I would wake up practically on the floor, like a hot dog tucked in a bun, with inflated portions of the mattress on either side of me).

Beyond this room was a large kitchen with a long wooden dining table that could seat more than a dozen people. On the island counter in the middle of the kitchen I often found mason jars Penelope was using for canning. (The “canning operation” eventually moved to the certified organic kitchen space set up in glass-walled garage.) The island was the area of the kitchen where prepared food for lunch and dinner were placed buffet-style. Across from the kitchen table was a sliding glass door leading out to a large deck that overlooked part of the farm. Typically, there were flies buzzing around the kitchen. Penelope would often say, “someone left open the compost again”—a small white plastic

bucket on the kitchen counter, next to the sink. The kitchen was often the most active area in the house, serving as a space not only for farmhands to gather for meals and snacks, but as a comfortable area to sit around and chat.

On the other side of the kitchen was the “woman’s area,” a bit smaller than the men’s area and more organized. Next to this room was a large living room. The living room had a random collection of haphazardly placed furniture—burgundy and floral patterned couches, over a dozen wooden chairs with different upholstered fabrics, several small cocktail tables, etc. Along the walls was a variety of pastel artwork depicting nature, as well as some watercolor portraits, at least one of which looks like Ross. At the far end of the living room was a small stage, requiring a step up to be reached, with an old, baby grand piano.

The living room often had farmhands relaxing and hanging out with each other. Occasionally, some talented farmhand would play the piano, and Penelope’s husband would sometimes be found practicing the piano as well. There was no television in any of the common areas of the house. There was one bedroom on the main floor that was typically empty and kept for “special guests” that Penelope sometimes had staying in the house. On the evening of the first night I was there, Penelope offered me the bedroom if “I needed a quiet place to work.” It seemed that she thought I was a special guest. I assumed I had this status in part because of my age, and also because I was there to do research. This bedroom had a full bathroom with shower, which the farmhands could use. A second full bathroom was situated just outside the bedroom that was more typically used by the farmhands—primarily because it could be relatively dirty and Penelope did

not comment about its cleanliness nearly as much as she commented about the guest bathroom's cleanliness.

Next to the living room was a long stairwell leading up to the top floor of the house, where Penelope and her husband had their bedroom. The second floor had two other bedrooms that Penelope rented out on a daily, weekly, or monthly period to guests. The upstairs area was off limits to the farmhands, and everyone seemed to be satisfied with this stipulation. In a small hallway separating the living room from the kitchen is a stairwell leading down to the basement. The basement is a dark, unruly mess. There are dozens of dried garlic stalks hanging from the ceiling. The first time Penelope sent me to the basement to get garlic for a sale she was making to a local restaurant, she warned me that, "it smells a bit down there because there's cat feces on the floor. We never trained the cat that comes and goes. He's there to chase the mice. Don't report me to the Health Department." She laughed and covered her face with her hands in comical shame.

Farmland surrounded the house. Of the 60 acres Penelope owned as part of the farm, she harvested on 10 acres. She said she would like to use more of the land for growing, but she did not have the manpower to manage it. Rolling Hills grew a variety of produce, including kale, lettuce, scallions, carrots, peppers, grape tomatoes, zucchini, cucumber, squash, blueberries and watermelon, as well as flowers that we would sometimes bundle into small arrangements and distribute to the CSA members as part of their weekly pickups. In addition to the areas for growing, there was a large greenhouse in the back of the house in which vegetables were also grown, and where new seedlings were nurtured during the colder seasons before planting in the ground.

There was a fenced area of land at the side of the house sectioned off for two dozen chickens, which included a small wooden chicken coop, inside of which hens would lay their eggs. This area was usually muddy. We often dumped soft or rotting vegetables into this area for the chickens—feeding the chickens organic produce resulted in some very fine eggs. Often times, there would be several chickens roaming around the property. One of the farmhands could be found a few times a day chasing down a chicken to put it back in the coop.

Another section of the farm was also fenced off for the four goats, whose numbers grew in size by the time I finished collecting field data. Near the back of the farmed land was a large compost pile where goat and cow dung, old vegetables, and dirt were piled high. This area smelled terribly. Beyond the farming area behind the house, through a small, dense patch of trees and across a small stream, was an open field with two cows. Aiko was primarily responsible for the daily milking of these cows (and she was the only one who really had any interest in milking). The second growing season I was there, these cows were moved closer to the house, to make daily milking a less burdensome task.

The People

Penelope, the owner and manager of Rolling Hills is a stubby 5-foot tall woman with a massive unkempt mane of stiff, light grey hair that extended past her shoulders. She is in her mid-sixties, although her darkly tanned skin and deep wrinkles, evidence of the many hours she spent in the sun while working on the farm, made her look even older. She has thick, muscular hands that always seemed dirty. She typically wore an

oversized, tattered old t-shirt, or a large raggedy wool sweater with holes in it that extended to her mid-thigh. She wore jeans and a pair of sneakers or rain boots, depending on whether she was trekking in the muddier part of the farm. Penelope was almost always smiling, and sometimes would sing to herself when she was picking crops or cooking in the kitchen. She acted very gentle and motherly toward all the volunteers as well as towards Filipe—although this persona as the gentle mother figure of the farm sometimes caused issues when she made requests that seemed out of line with the farmhands' expectations.

Penelope has no children of her own and told me that she considers the farm volunteers her children. Penelope endlessly worked on the farm. It was infrequent that I would find her sitting down. She filled her days with activities, including collecting crops, organizing and reorganizing the garage and CSA space, canning vegetables, cooking, working at the Waldorf school or heading into town for a meeting, or visiting another local farm. Her energy and excitement about her work made the rotating crew of farmhands, all of whom were about 40 years younger than Penelope, feel silly for ever being fatigued or complaining about joints that ached. Filipe, the one full-time paid employee on the farm, said, "Penelope, not good. Not healthy." He said that she worked too much. Filipe would often make a high-pitched "jibber jabber" sound and move his thumb and the rest of his hand up and down like one would move a sock puppet, suggesting that she's working too hard, and endlessly talking as well. He said that she gives him too many directions and that he works too much as well. This complaint about providing too many demands or specifics about work was also made by some of the volunteers.

Ross, Penelope's husband is a very quiet, nearly six feet tall, slightly lumbering man. He is a former teacher. On the first morning I started work on the farm, he did not say hello to me when I entered the house. Ross does not have much of a presence on the farm, and would not always join us for breakfast or lunch—the two times of the day in which everyone in the house would gather together to talk about the work that needed to be done or any issues or concerns we had.

Filipe, a lifelong farmer from Guatemala, was Penelope's only full-time paid employee. He was in his early 40s and from what I could understand from his changing stories, he has one son in college and one son in high school. On my first day on the farm, prior to going out to work in the fields, Penelope warned me that Filipe would ask me, “‘How many girlfriends do you have.’ And if you say none, he’ll ask, ‘How many boyfriends do you have.’” She said that I should not be offended by any of his comments. She added that sometimes he can, “say things that are inappropriate, and he doesn’t understand when I tell him that he can’t talk to people like that, especially women.”

Filipe has been working at Rolling Hills for five years. He was short and dark-skinned with a stocky build, like that of Penelope, but with a bit of a belly. He waddled side-to-side slightly when he walked, as if he had a bad leg. He never complained of any physical ailments except for being tired. Despite his short stature and crooked walk, he was a very fast harvester and very strong, lifting heavy cases of picked vegetables and hauling large amounts of produce in wheelbarrows across the property. In his very broken English, Filipe made nonstop comments about women and sex. These comments were not about the women who would visit the farm, although he would occasionally remark about a new girl who he thought “was very pretty,” and he would wink and laugh heartedly.

When I first began working with Filipe, he asked me if I had a girlfriend. And when I responded that I did, I was prepared for his follow up questions: “How many?”

Eric: Just one.

Filipe: One?!

Eric: nodding yes.

Filipe: How many children?

Eric: None.

Filipe: Ohhhhh

Eric: How about you.

Filipe: I have two wives in Guatemala and six children

Eric: Wow.

Filipe: Yeah. I want to be like Bin Laden. [laughs heartedly]

Other times when I worked with Filipe, he would mimic sounds that wild birds or the rooster was making, and then tell me that they were calling for me, saying, “Yes. Eric, Eric. Yes.” He always followed these comments with a loud laugh, showing his crooked and discolored teeth.

Filipe told me that the former farm he worked for was not too far from Rolling Hills. He said that he would work 11 hours a day and then, “have a beer. Good beer. And a (gestures like he’s smoking).” He said that that the farm owner at the farm where he used to work would tell him that they worked hard enough for that day. He always had Sunday off. Filipe said, “That’s a good life.” Penelope told me that the guy who Filipe used to work for wound up selling his farm. He told Penelope about Filipe and she hired him.

Filipe typically did not eat breakfast or lunch with us in the kitchen. Instead, he ate in the basement, where he had a small table and chair for himself. Both Filipe and Penelope confirmed that he chose to eat down there, even though he was asked to eat in the kitchen with everyone else. At lunchtime, Aiko typically “put together a plate for Filipe,” as Penelope would call it, including a little bit of each of the items cooked for

lunch. Aiko would often walk out onto the deck and yell out: “Filliipppeee!” to tell him that lunch was ready and to notify him that she was bringing down his plate of food.

Aiko was a long-term farmhand who was interested in pursuing a career in farming. She was a tall, very slender Japanese woman in her early 20s. She was born and raised in Japan, but went to college in the United States. Her mother was an English teacher in Japan, and she spoke English without an accent. She was very friendly and truly enjoyed working on the farm, seemingly more than any other farmhand. She had an interesting face, with ears that stuck out a bit, crooked teeth, a very slender nose and a small oval head. One time when we went into town and were both ogling at a cute baby, the baby suddenly furrowed its brow and looked at us in a strange manner. I told Aiko that the baby had a weird reaction to us, and she said, “babies always do that to me.”

Aiko epitomized the physical appearance of an earthy hippy. She wore the same old, dirty jeans every day, an old battered t-shirt, and complemented her outfit with long, unkempt hair. She did not seem to regularly shower, and her arms and clothing were often soiled. Although she cooked lunch for the group on many days, I did observe that she typically performed a brief water-only wash of her hands before cooking. She often walked around outside without shoes, and her work boots, which were actually rain boots, each had a tear near the sole that let water in, limiting their usefulness.

Based on conversations I had with Penelope, there was usually one farmhand who had some prior farming experience and who was committed to working on the farm for an extended period of time. Prior to her work at Rolling Hills, Aiko worked on another farm for 6 months after graduating from college. She was in the process of applying to larger farms that had specific training programs in livestock maintenance. Aiko left

Rolling Hills about the same time I ended my data collection, and she began working at a farm in California.

AeroGears

AeroGears is an aerospace parts and commercial manufacturing business located in a northeast city. AeroGears has been in business for nearly fifty years, and is now owned and primarily managed by the founder's son-in-law, Leo. AeroGears' founder died in the late 1990s. Leo is married and has two daughters of his own, whom he says "don't really have any interest in this business." Although AeroGears originally performed commercial work for local clients around the city, slowly picking up national clients (including gun manufacturers), in the past three years AeroGears was awarded several large government contracts to make parts for the production of military planes. AeroGears was awarded these contracts because of their recent AS9100 accreditation, a quality management system standard for the aerospace industry. There is potential for a greater shift in their business to government work, which would bring in additional lucrative contracts. This possible shift would require adjustments to staff and training of employees, among other changes. AeroGears continues to make metal parts for a variety of vendors, from those that make elevators to companies that make Geiger counters.

Aerospace parts were more expensive to make because of the quality of materials needed and the complexity of the part. Commercial parts were for products where precision was much less critical—small gears for handheld children's toys, parts for a coffee machine, etc. Nonetheless, all these parts were constructed according to blueprints provided by the end-product manufacturer, or developed by AeroGears and approved by

the end-product manufacturer. All parts were to be made according to precise measurements. Blueprints provided variance for each part, typically giving an acceptable range within a few millimeters of the spec itself.

Factory jobs may range from a dozen pieces of the same part, to fifty or even three hundred. As the metal parts are cut and shaped on each machine, machinists are responsible for ensuring that the cuts are within the acceptable limits specified in the prints. The quality control department provides additional review of select pieces of each batch to verify their proper production. Parts that fall outside their variance are not necessarily discarded or “reworked.” A judgment call may be made on completed parts that machinists did not catch early in the process, to determine if the parts can be shipped, even if they are imperfect. For example, for a rifle manufacturer that AeroGears had worked with for years, they made the same few pieces hundreds of times. The quality control personnel know how the piece was used in the gun and what sort of level of error would still produce a usable part. Aerospace pieces that fell outside of their written parameters were never considered viable.

Jack is the floor manager and wields the most power in the organization after Leo. He has been at AeroGears for about 15 years. All floor employees, except for the assistant quality manager who had a work station in the middle of the factory floor, reported to Jack. Alex, the quality control manager and my primary informant, can be considered third in line in terms of power and responsibility at the factory. He has been at AeroGears for just over two years. Alex previously worked in large manufacturing organizations. He was also a union member and served as secretary of his local union for several years until the factory he worked at closed down. His experience as a union

secretary significantly influenced his perspective of the organization of resources at AeroGears, and he had strong feelings about the treatment of the employees at the factory. At AeroGears, Alex was primarily responsible for processing the paperwork of newly received orders and organizing the materials necessary before the “job” was sent to the factory floor. I reported directly to Alex. Jamie is the factory secretary. She has worked in the factory for five years and handles billing, invoices, and payroll.

Daily work at the factory began at 7:00 AM with the sound of a loud resonating bell. The bell rings again at 10:30 AM for a 15 minute break, at 12:30 PM for a 30 minutes lunch, and then again at 5:00 PM when the day ends. Alex thinks this bell is unnecessary for such a small factory. He said, “You don’t think they can read the big clock on that wall out there?” He also has made comments about the employees learning to be regulated by that bell. Sometimes when the morning bell rang, he said, “And they’re off!” and we would see some of the floor workers making their way from the break room to their machines. All employees except for Alex, Kris (a machine programmer), and Jamie (the secretary), work a half-day on Saturdays, from 8:00 AM until 12:00 PM. There are two employees who work the night shift, from 5:00 PM until 3:00 AM, and an afternoon shift on Saturdays. Thus, employees work approximately 54 hours a week, including their “forced overtime” hours, for which workers are paid time and a half.

Access

A colleague whom I met through a conference we both attended on small businesses, connected me with AeroGears. She works as a consultant for small manufacturing companies around the Northeast. When I contacted her with my initial

research questions for my dissertation, she immediately thought of AeroGears. She told me that this was “a fast growing company...that would be open to having someone like you working with them.” In further conversations, she told me that the AeroGears president, Leo, would like to have someone with a higher level of education working with them because he likes to engage individuals who are successful in their fields. To Leo, my great achievement was that I was successful in school. Leo never went to college, and prided himself on learning his business acumen through “real-world practice.” Nevertheless, he had admiration for those who completed higher education, as well as those who reached high levels of success in government and industry.

Leo and Jack formally interviewed me at the factory. The interview itself took place in the company’s small second floor conference room. After talking, Leo took me to his office and showed me a picture he had on the wall above his desk, where he was shaking President Bill Clinton’s hand. This picture was next to a letter from Warren Buffett, which he received after participating in a selective small business program for urban businesses. His face light up when he showed these prized possessions to me.

A day after the interview I emailed Leo to formally thank him for taking the time to speak with me and for the tour. He said that he believed I showed “self-initiative” and would like to bring me into the organization. He asked me how much time I would have to work and when I could start. Leo insisted on paying me an hourly wage, even though I told him it wasn’t necessary and that the exchange of my labor for access to the factory and his employees was the structure I set up with my other field sites. However, he insisted on paying me a nominal hourly wage.

Several weeks after I began working at AeroGears, I was speaking with the consultant who connected me with the company, and she asked if Leo showed me the picture of him shaking Clinton's hand. She said, "He's very proud of that picture. It's funny." She said smiling.

Responsibilities

When I began data collection at AeroGears, I started working two days a week, on Thursdays and Fridays. Although these days switched to Mondays and Friday, after a year I cut back to Fridays only. Prior to my first day of work, I was not sure what Leo wanted me to do at AeroGears. In fact, Alex (the Quality Manager who I did not meet when I was interviewed) told me on my first day that I'd be working with him. Alex said that Leo told him that I was hired to help navigate the new planning and scheduling software system that AeroGeras was hoping to install. Leo assumed that I would be able to handle the task of upgrading the company's software because I was, "a bright, self-starter" as he determined during our interview. However, during my time at AeroGears, the software was never adopted—which was predicted by Alex during my first week on the job. Instead of updating the company's software, I spent time reviewing, updating, and maintaining system protocols for quality control. I reviewed manufacturing blue prints, as well as assisted with monthly internal audits in preparation for a future audit review of the company's Aerospace Standard accreditation, AS9100 (which was based on the ISO 9100 quality system requirements).

The Setting

The factory is housed in a large, red brick, two floor, building. The company moved to its current location approximately eight years earlier, from an “old falling apart building in the middle of a busy street” as one long-term employee told me. Employees spoke about how impressed they were when they made the move to their current location. The factory floor is filled with hundreds of thousands of dollars of computerized cutting machines, many of which operate nearly 24 hours a day. In addition to the equipment on the factory’s first floor, there is also a common room for employees with several tables, where most of the employees eat their breakfast and lunch. The common room also has several refrigerators, a coffee maker, and a microwave. There is a small men’s locker room and bathroom next to the common room. On the other side of the common room is an office with four desks. Jack’s desk abuts the glass wall, so he can look out on the factory floor. When I first started collecting field notes, the only other desk in that office was being used was by Kris, the programmer. Eventually, two other people, another programmer and an assistant floor manager, were hired during my data collection and began using the two desks in the office.

A long stairwell leads to the upstairs offices that are positioned above the common space and Jack’s shared office space. There is a conference room immediately at the top of the staircase with a large table that can seat 10. To the left of the staircase is a small storage room with old file cabinets. On the other side of the conference room is the large “main office” with four desks facing out over the factory floor. Leo’s and Jamie’s desks are closest to the glass wall that faces out to the factory. Alex’s desk is situated behind Leo’s desk, and my desk was behind Jamie’s. Down a short hall next to the main

office space was a coffee maker, refrigerator, sink, and a toilet. Passed this hall and continuing down two stairs was Leo's private office, referred to as his "executive suite" by the managers and floor workers. Leo infrequently used his office. Jack often came upstairs from his office to discuss important issues with Leo and Alex. Since my desk was in the main office, I was involved in (or overheard) many important conversations and events from the management's perspective at the factory.

The People

Leo is a short, spritely, and brusque second-generation Italian American in his early 50s. He moves around the office hurriedly, seemingly running into rooms as he enters them. He typically wears fitted jeans and a cotton polo short sleeve shirt with casual leather shoes or loafers to work each day. He has close-cut salt and pepper hair. When he is on the phone with long-time clients and they ask each other, "how've you been?", he routinely commented: "Doing well, but getting older. Remember when I used to have black hair?! Now it's all gray!" He has a bright white smile and carries around lip balm in his pocket, which he regularly applies. Leo is the primary salesman for the organization, and is the face of the company at sales meetings and activities he participates in with local government officials. A consultant who worked with AeroGears said that Leo, "certainly has the gift of gab" and the quality manager has said Leo "is a great salesman" who has been able to "talk down clients that were pissed at us...and by the end of the conversation they're laughing."

Jack is responsible for nearly all activities on the factory floor, including machinist work, deburring, shipping and delivery, product design and machine

programming. In contrast to Leo's effortless movement, energy, and cheery demeanor, Jack seems to lumber around the factory. He wears jeans and tan Timberland construction boots, typically with a long-sleeve plaid button-up shirt. He has a short well-kept beard and tousled light brown hair. He perpetually looks tired, having deep discolored bags, and frequently rubbing his eyes. I hardly ever saw him without his ceramic cup of coffee which he often refilled, making the trek upstairs to pour a fresh cup of coffee (rather than use the one downstairs in the machinists' common room). He would often begin conversations with criticisms. In fact, the first thing he said to me on the first day of work when I arrived two minutes late because I could not find street parking, was "the work day starts at 7. You need to get here on time." Nevertheless, he also smiled easily and would often make jokes during conversations we would all have in the main upstairs office.

Alex was my primary informant at AeroGears. On a daily basis, he provided me his opinions, insights, and suggestions for firm improvements. He also taught me how to use the company's JobBoss data system software to process orders and how to complete blueprints and forms required prior to releasing jobs to the factory floor. He is about the same age as Leo and also dresses in jeans and a cotton polo shirt nearly every day. However, as Alex told me, "I enjoy my food." As a consequence of this pleasure, Alex has a fairly substantial midsection, which he keeps in check by daily afternoon walks around the neighborhood during his lunchtime. His receding hairline is closely cut, and he has a neatly trimmed goatee.

Alex is a very focused worker. Although he is constantly joking throughout the day, he consistently works while taking jabs at Leo, Jamie, and myself. However, Alex

also makes it very clear that he works his hours, and “at 5 o’clock, I’m out the door.” He often let’s us know that he’s looking at the clock, by updating us about how much longer it is until the end of the work day, or what his plans are for the weekend. On one Friday morning at about 9:00 AM, after Leo and Jack had a conversation about another order that is delayed in processing and will not be delivered to the customer on time, Alex said: “[o]n Saturday it's going to be beautiful. Because that's where my head is. Is it 5 o'clock yet? I need to get home and watch the Yankees tonight. Ya know, I don't get paid enough to pull my hair out about these things.”

I noticed that Leo and Jack had work-designated cell phones, but Alex did not. When I asked Alex about this, he said that when he first started working “[Leo] asked me if I wanted a BlackBerry. Of course I don't want a Blackberry! I don't want to get emails on a Saturday morning. No way.” On the large “work” calendar that Alex has on his desk, the only things he has written for the month of November are *Modern Family* (the television show that his girlfriend said she likes), and DEER HUNTING written in capital letters across the last week of the month, when he’s going on vacation. He doesn’t list any of his appointments, meetings, production schedules, or other information.

Jamie is the slender, smiley, old-looking 50-something secretary at AeroGears. Her quick movements around the office seem disjointed from her aged skin—heavy wrinkles and age spots, from what looks like too many years of tanning. She jokes throughout the day with Leo, Alex and Jack, as well as with the customers who call on the phone. She’s familiar with many of the clients, and often answers the phone with, “Yes, my daaaarling.” Or “Hello, dear.” Leo told me that she has “a way with people that puts them in a good mood” so that when Leo gets on the phone, they are easier to deal

with. Leo said he loves having her in the office because she lifts everyone's mood. In addition to her ongoing banter, she also has a loud, boisterous cackle of a laugh that fills the office throughout the day. Sometimes when she is on the phone with a client her laugh can become so loud that Alex and I will look at each other across the office with raised eyebrows wondering what the discussion is about.

In addition to these three primary managers and the factory secretary, tasks at AeroGears are organized into a distinct division of labor, which was determined by a combination of skill level and seniority. Aside from the managers, AeroGears had approximately 22 employees at the time I started data collection, 12 machinists, two women working in deburring, two in quality control, two working on designs and machine programming, one secretary and the floor manager. Most of the staff has worked for AeroGears for more than ten years. Machinists came into the job with high levels of experience from their prior positions. Some of the older workers are European immigrants who developed their skills earlier in life in apprenticeship programs. Almost all the employees hired in the past decade have left AeroGears to pursue other manufacturing jobs—an important issue considering AeroGears' aspirations for growth.

ElderCare

ElderCare is a franchised health care company, primarily placing health aides in the homes of elderly patients who require various levels of assistance. The territory this franchise location covers is a northeastern suburban county of mostly upper middle-class income individuals. Clients were nearly all white. When I started working at ElderCare, the franchisee was in her second year of operations. Alice, the owner of this location, is

an ambitious, middle-aged, MBA graduate from a top business school who previously held middle management corporate positions. She is single and without children, and has saved her earnings and invested wisely so that, according to a business consultant and friend of Alice who helped secure this field site for me, she could retire and live very comfortably without working if she wanted. Alice told me that she had always wanted to own her old business, and when she was let go from her previous job, she decided “to finally go for it,” as she put it. She said that she opted to become a franchisee owner because, “after looking at the data of success rates of new businesses, franchisees were doing better.” She went into home health care because she had a negative experience looking for health care assistance for her own father who fell ill several years earlier. She felt that there was a lack of quality home health care companies providing genuine care for their elderly clients.

When I first started working at this field site in the summer, the primary ElderCare office staff consisted of Alice and Jenn. Jenn was the office administrator, whose responsibilities ranged from scheduling to billing to payroll and basic daily office functions like answering the phone, ordering office supplies and making photocopies. Jenn was Alice’s first employee and she continued working with Alice throughout the time that I collected data. However, she left soon after I completed working at ElderCare to take a position that would enable her to be home with her newborn in the afternoons. Alice’s nephew and Jenn’s daughter both were working part-time during the summer months, primarily assisting Jenn in general office responsibilities and updating client and employee information. The office also employed two part-time nurses who frequently visited the office and whose primary responsibilities were to provide an initial assessment

of potential clients, develop clients' care plan, and visit clients every two to three weeks to ensure home health aides were providing the care designated by the care plan.

ElderCare had approximately 25 “available aides” when I first started working. At that time, about 12 aides were working either full or part-time. As was standard in the industry, most aides simultaneously held positions at other home health care agencies—taking a client from whichever agency called them first. The vast majority of the aides were immigrants from Africa, especially from Ghana. Home health aides were paid between \$11-13 per hour, depending on their experience, skill level, and the particular type of job they were working on. For example, sometimes a single aide would take care of a husband and wife, and thus be paid more for handling two clients at a time. While clients typically hired aides to work a few times a week for a few hours a day, some clients needed “live-ins” to provide around-the-clock care. These cases were more lucrative for the company, as well as for the home health aides.

During my field site data collection, ElderCare dramatically increased its client load, hired dozens of additional home health aides (although only about three dozen were ever active at a single time) as well as a new secretary, a full-time nurse, a full-time scheduler and a full-time sales agent. In addition to providing care for the elderly, they began providing care for disabled children, providing additional assistance for elderly patients in nursing homes, and began working closely with hospitals to develop plans for transitioning patients from the hospital back to their homes.

Access

I was introduced to Alice, the owner of ElderCare through a consultant I was acquainted with who regularly worked with ElderCare. He had known Alice prior to becoming an ElderCare franchisee owner and his continued work with her was part business and part friendship. I had a casual phone interview with Alice, where she primarily asked me about my research interests and told me what she needed assistance with. It was rather informal, but that was all that was needed to secure my first day of work at the office. During the time I collected data at ElderCare, the consultant who introduced us continued working for ElderCare—coming into the office once every week or two. He served as an important informant during my data collection.

I typically came to the office one day a week, on Mondays, and sometime made the time to come in for an additional half-day (either in the morning or the afternoon). After about six months of work, I routinely came in two half-days a week, and towards the end of the data collection period, transitioned back to one full day a week.

Responsibilities

I was initially brought into the organization to assist ElderCare with their Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) process, a health industry accreditation that is typically reserved for large institutions and hospitals. The home office of the franchise requested that all franchisees complete this accreditation as a way to achieve market differentiation, since no other home health franchise (and few small private firms) was JCAHO accredited. Like the AS9100 accreditation process AeroGears undertook, the JCAHO accreditation was a tedious and intense process of

organizing a large amount of paperwork, establishing new organizational routines and processes, and teaching employees those routines so they could properly perform them during on-site official accreditation review. After securing the accreditation, about four months into the data collection, I primarily assisted in updating and organizing employee and client files, developing multiple spreadsheets to track home health aides' ongoing training and certification updates, and assisted with sales efforts. I also represented our office at the annual franchisee conference, where I had the chance to meet dozens of franchise administrative assistants, nurses and owners to "compare notes" about our offices, learn more about company strategy and also to socialize with and learn more about the types of people in the home health care industry.

The Setting

The ElderCare office is located within a small, two floor office building on a busy suburban street peppered with other mid-rise office buildings and strip malls. The building houses a medical office that occupies half of the first floor of the building, and a variety of other small businesses. The ElderCare office is a basic square space, with Alice's office taking up the far corner of the square. Upon first entering the office, there is a short hallway, at the end of which is a desk that faces the wall. This was my primary work station. Next to my desk was a large receptionist desk. This desk was usually unoccupied unless Alice wanted to work on her laptop in the "common space" of the office. Behind this reception area was Jenn's desk. On the wall to the left of Jenn is a large dry erase board, which is usually blank.

Behind the wall with the dry erase board is Alice's office. It's unremarkable, mostly organized with a homely desk lamp that gives a calming mood. Alice splits her time between using this office space and the desk just outside the office, in the common space. Once a full-time nurse was hired, this desk became the nurse's desk. Beyond this desk was a long, narrow room that had the coffee maker, a small refrigerator, a fax machine and printer, and several tall cabinets that held the paperwork of ElderCare's employees and clients. Sharing a wall with this file/storage room was a small conference room with a round table that could tightly squeeze six people. ElderCare held meetings in this room, interviewed potential new hires, and it is where we would sometimes eat lunch together.

The People

Alice is a tall, thin woman with shoulder length faded blonde hair and an ashy complexion. She is in her early fifties, but has deep wrinkles. She dresses as she likely had when she worked in the corporate world, with single-toned business dresses, crisp wool slacks and blouses, and little jewelry ornamentation. The one item that seems to contradict this formal presence is her pink cell phone covering, complete with tiny sparkly stones—I imagined that the audience for this cell phone covering was more teeny-bopper than corporate executive. Nonetheless, such an accessory seemed to suggest Alice had a playful side, although it was not necessarily evident during daily work. She is an “excellent communicator, and an attentive listener” as the employees told me, and she is willing to entertain comments from the staff, even though it was evident she sometimes disagreed with people's suggestions even before they finished making their comments.

Alice has a hand in all aspects of the business, even as the business grew and employees were hired to assume specific responsibilities. Alice was careful, however, not to interfere with anyone else's work, although her opinion was frequently asked.

The staff often requested her help with everything from computer issues, to matching an aide with a client, to the quickest driving directions to the grocery store. Although Alice would sometimes roll her eyes at the requests made of her, or sometimes respond back to her staff with: "That's why you're here, to figure that out," she would make these comments with a gentle tone and a smile. Alice conveys confidence and can be assertive when a decision needed to be made or when she occasionally needed to override a decision by one of her employees. The staff considers her to be business savvy, and she has earned the respect of her employees. Alice was described by the saleswoman as "a smart business woman...who's able to take the risk of getting this business going in a difficult industry."

Despite her business acumen and confidence, Alice often resists stepping outside the office to make sales. In order to attract business to ElderCare, the franchise headquarters suggests promoting the company at hospitals, at retirement communities, in full-time care facilities, and at various community meetings. However, Alice seemed to dread such work, even though the consultant told me she is, "great at sales. I mean, she's enthusiastic and she cares and she knows how to sell this to customers. I don't know why she hates doing it so much. That's why I need to push her to go out there." Thus, even though the office staff could have used additional assistance with scheduling and paperwork, Alice instead chose to hire a salesperson.

Jenn is a friendly and energetic mid-forty-year-old woman, tall, with long legs, dark black hair cut short framing her face, and a wide toothy smile. One of the aides said that she “was probably a stunner when she was younger.” Prior to her position at ElderCare, Jenn was a loan officer and worked with her husband, a real estate broker, until the recession hit and home sales dropped. One of Alice’s friends who knew that Alice was looking for an administrative assistant and scheduler, recommended Jenn for the position. Alice was quick to hire Jenn. Jenn laughs easily with aides on the phone and is quickly empathetic with some of the elderly clients and their needs. One elderly patient whom Jenn refers to as “my boyfriend” calls Jenn once or twice a week just to chat on the phone for a few minutes—Jenn usually puts him on speaker phone so she can continue her paperwork while engaging in a conversation with the client. Jenn enjoys being able to help him feel a little less lonely. When the nurse said she wound up chatting with this client on the phone once when Jenn stepped out for lunch, Jenn jokingly exclaimed: “My boyfriend’s cheating on me?!”

Despite her upbeat, friendly and caring attitude, Jenn is also quick to get angry at clients or aides that act inconsiderate or “do things to make my life more difficult than it already is,” as Jenn put it. Jenn is very sociable, and the consultant noted that “Jenn can turn the sweet on” when needed. She must often coax aides into filling last-minute jobs or sometimes work with undesirable clients. She is often heard on the phone asking, “Can you do a favor for me, my love” in a very gentle tone and end with, “I owe you one.” But once she gets off the phone, in a somewhat disgruntled voice she’d say, “That was a lot of fun, kissing her ass.”

Jenn is a dedicated worker who often takes work home from the office to complete. However, she also complains about some of Alice's decisions, which results in additional work for Jenn. Jenn added the job of taxi driver to her list of responsibilities, driving aides from the train or bus stations to clients' homes. Jenn was also "on call" a few days each week, receiving phone calls (or text messages) from aides during the night if a client had some sort of emergency or if an aide must cancel a scheduled workday last minute. Jenn would periodically joke about not receiving a raise since she first began working. However, since Jenn handled payroll and accounts receivable, she was knowledgeable about how much ElderCare made, or lost, each quarter, and knew there was little room for salary increases. Overall, Jenn believed that Alice was a good boss, even though she believed that "you've got to be crazy to open a business like this."

Thorny Rose

The Thorny Rose is a third-generation family-owned and -operated florist. Four siblings, three full-time and one part-time worker, can all be considered managers at the florist. The florist is engaged in both retail and wholesale work and has a diverse number of revenue streams. Most of the store's revenue is made from retail sales to individual customers—including a substantial amount of funeral work, arrangement for grave sites (including hundreds of grave covers during the Christmas season), individuals purchasing arrangements for birthdays, graduations, and other special events, and a few key holidays, including Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. During the winter holiday season the florist also does good business with the sale of Christmas trees, wreaths and holiday fruit, chocolate and candy baskets. The florist also sells vegetables during the summer from a

small garden they recently constructed, and an assortment of baskets, stuffed animals, lawn ornaments, and other snap-purchase items. Finally, Thorny Rose has increasingly been marketing to brides as a way to increase their wedding business. On their wholesale side, the Thorny Rose sells Christmas trees to other florists, as well as prepared potted plants to graveyards, as well as palm crosses and other religious items to churches. Because the business has been in town for three generations, the florist also provides floral arrangements and other decorations for town events, including new year's celebrations, as well as for police and fire department activities.

The siblings are ethnically mixed, German-Argentinian, and their ages range from 35 to 47. While the oldest brother, Julian, is considered "the head" at the Thorny Rose, and he is in fact the President of the organization, he does not necessarily have power or control over the work of his siblings. Nicholas, the third oldest, assumes a lot of day-to-day responsibility, and is constantly talking about ways to improve the florist and develop new revenue streams. The other siblings include Lilia, the oldest sister who works part-time, and Tyler the youngest sister. Freddie, another sibling, used to work for the store but by the time I started collecting field notes, he had moved into construction. He occasionally worked at the store—typically on the major holidays when additional help is most needed. The business has no formal designation of responsibilities among the siblings, although each sibling has developed his or her own niche over the past few years.

Julian, who is also the longest-serving employee at the Thorny Rose, handles the vast majority of the work. He assumes responsibilities for nearly all the administrative work, including paying bills and monthly taxes, submitting invoices to clients,

completing insurance paperwork, etc. as well as handling the daily work of making funeral arrangements, ordering flowers, and taking phone orders. He asks his siblings to handle some of the daily paperwork required for the business to operate, but he is always met with resistance, which is one of the reasons for ongoing tension in the business. Throughout each week I collected field notes, Julian lamented over the fact that his siblings refuse to take on additional responsibilities at the florist: “I can’t trust my siblings to do anything that needs to get done around here.” Despite the long hours that all the siblings put into the store, only Julian completes the daily administrative tasks of the business.

Work at the florist Monday through Saturday begins at 10am and ends about 6pm. Sunday store hours are 11am to 5pm. Julian and Nicholas usually work five to six days a week, and nearly every day for two months straight during the winter holiday season. Tyler works five days a week, typically four weekdays and one weekend day. However, she has only worked full time at the florist for two years, and is always on the lookout for an art therapy position, a job she held prior to joining her siblings at Thorny Rose. Lilia works part time, primarily focusing on the florists’ growing wedding work. She and Nicholas argue the most among all siblings—and Lilia has used these daily fights as a rationale for not working at the florist full time. Instead, she comes to the florist for bridal appointments and to make the floral arrangements for weddings, as well as “helping out,” during busy holidays and if a sibling is sick and needs replacing for the day.

Access

I was introduced to Nicholas, the third oldest sibling, through a family acquaintance and close friend of Nicholas. This family friend occasionally worked at the Thorny Rose during major holidays (Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and the lead-up to Christmas) as a favor to Nicholas, and for a little extra cash. Although I called Nicholas several times, leaving messages about my interest in working at the Thorny Rose for my research, I never received a return phone call. The family friend suggested that I just show up at the store and speak to Nicholas directly. So that's what I did. Nicholas did not apologize for failing to call me back—he simply said that the shop's been extremely busy, but he was glad I stopped by. He said that he needed someone to help clean up the shop and answer the phone the following week, and asked me to come in. The following week I worked for an afternoon, helping to clean and organize the store and answer the phones. I meet several of his siblings as well. Nicholas said that I seemed like a hard worker and he would be willing to bring me on, but he couldn't pay me very much. I told him that if I could set my schedule of when I would work, I would not ask to be paid. His eyes got wide with my suggestion he asked, "Really?" He said that that the setup I suggested would work for him. I started working on Mondays and on Wednesday afternoons, as well as occasionally on the weekends. During busy holiday weeks I was asked to work three or four full days in a row at the florist—I was paid hourly when I worked more than my volunteering days.

Responsibilities

I began working at the Thorny Rose as Julian's "assistant," helping with the administrative tasks. Essentially, I completed the work that the siblings did not want to handle. On the days I worked, I also became responsible for tracking, negotiating, and organizing the online orders we received from the store's website, as well as orders from the global floral ordering services, Teleflora and FTD (Florists' Transworld Delivery). The Thorny Rose served as a fulfillment center for these two services. We received orders from Teleflora and FTD via fax, and we could accept, reject or negotiate the price and delivery time with representatives from these services. We almost always negotiated for a higher price, based upon the type and quality of flowers required, distance to deliver, time needed to create the order, etc. However, if we did not respond to these orders—either negotiating, accepting the order as specified, or rejecting to fulfill the order—within 30 minutes of receiving it, we were responsible for completing the order at the original ask price and delivery time. If we did not complete the order by the time specified, we were still expected to complete the order as soon as possible and the florist would have a negative mark put on our record. Accumulated marks would drop our rank on the fulfillment orders' end, resulting in the florist receiving fewer orders from these services.

Because online order fulfillment was another administrative task that the siblings typically did not want to take responsibility for, there were many occasions in which these orders fell through the cracks, resulting in a lowered rank and fewer orders received. In addition to assisting with other paperwork and billing, Nicholas and Julian hoped that I would be able to develop a system to better sort the orders (between

accepted, pending negotiation, rejected, and fulfilled) so that fewer orders were missed on days when I am not at the florist.

The Setting

The florist is situated in a suburban town in the northeast that has undergone a somewhat dramatic transformation in the past few decades, transitioning from a middle-class Eastern European immigrant neighborhood to a lower-middle class black and Hispanic neighborhood. Nevertheless, a large number of towns within 15 minutes of the Thorny Rose are considered some of the nicest suburban towns in the state. The Thorny Rose is situated on a busy road at the end of a small strip mall, next to a dollar store, and across the street from a 7-11.

If you were to face the store, at the left is a large fenced-off lot that extends to a road running perpendicular to the store. The large lot is referred to as the florist's "garden center." Although Nicholas has aspirations to turn this area into, as he put it, a "Home Depot-style area with plants, pots, and gardening equipment," for now it has several old, wooden shelving units that hold a variety of seasonal potted plants, a 20-foot table at the back edge of the lot covered by a blue plastic tarp suspended by makeshift poles with a variety of ribbons, silk and plastic flowers, Styrofoam cut outs, rusting wires and other assorted and aging floral paraphernalia. In the spring, about nine months after I first started working, Nicholas sectioned off an area of the lot with small wooden beams, and filled it with topsoil to develop a small garden to grow and sell tomatoes and green peppers. For Valentine's Day, a large refrigerator trailer was parked in the lot to hold the hundred or so pre-made arrangements we sold during the holiday. And from the end of

November through December, the entire lot was transformed into a Christmas tree sales center—temporary poles were positioned throughout the lot, with wires suspended across them to hold dozens of trees.

Between the lot and the store itself is a 15- by 50-foot-long greenhouse. The greenhouse holds a large variety of empty pots and non-flowering leaf plants. Many of these plants are, as Julian said, “being nursed back to life.” Long-time customers sometimes brought their dying plants to the florist to see if Thorny Rose, “can work its magic” as one customer put it, to get the plants healthy again.

No matter where you look in the florist, the shop appears old and in disarray. There are plants throughout the store, some on the floor, some on display tables, others on tiered shelves, but without a sense of order. Spools of ribbon that are primarily lined up against one wall can also be found on the working tables, near the cash register, and on the display tables. Buckets of loose flowers are put throughout the store to “bloom”—i.e. their flowers slowly opening so they can be used for arrangements.

There are two large worktables aligned at the back of the store. Behind these worktables is a long glass refrigerator display case holding a large variety of single flowers bins that designers use to make their daily floral arrangements. Another refrigerator is situated on the wall shared by the greenhouse. This refrigerator looks empty in comparison, and primarily holds prepared arrangements waiting for delivery. At the end of this refrigerator is a spinning card display and some shelving with some additional small plants.

Near the front of the shop is a “meeting” area used for wedding and funeral consultations. There is a round table in this small space, surrounded by silk flowers,

metal displays and several photo books of wedding and funeral arrangements. On more than one occasion, Lilia would have to remove a metal stand with a long ribbon on which was written, “In Loving Memory” or “Rest in Peace” in order to give space to a mother and daughter interested in getting a flower quote for wedding arrangements. Although I could not know whether this disorganization was disconcerting to customers looking to plan their joyous occasion, Lilia did complain to her siblings that funeral arrangement displays needed to be stored properly. This issue, along with many others, was never fixed during the time that I collected data.

Situated toward the back of the store is the check out counter. The cash register perched on the desk looked like an antique. It did not sit flat on the check out counter, but is slightly angled with a small floral book positioned underneath the front right corner. This elevation is required in order for the register to open. Behind the register area are three desks, and beyond the desks is a small, old dirty restroom that just about fits a toilet and a sink. I hoped customers would not ask me if they could use the bathroom because I was embarrassed with its lack of cleanliness and the impending feeling that the toilet may overflow at the very next flush. Within the office space behind the register, two desks had old computers, monitors, and phones on them. One desk also had a large printer and a scanner. Shelving above each of these desks held a variety of cracked plastic containers with old receipts and a variety of paperwork. All the desks were cluttered. It drove me a little mad everyday to see paperwork scattered on these desks, sticking out of books that were strewn on the shelves. Nonetheless, Julian had “a system” among this mess—and when he needed to find a bill, a receipt, a driving ticket, tax forms, or a lease, he was somehow able to pull it out of the mess. After being politely scolded for attempting to

more rationally organize all these papers, leaving Julian scrambling to find a customer's order he had remembered that he positioned on top of a pile of papers underneath the computer keyboard, I never attempted to rearrange any paperwork again.

Next to the check out area was a stairwell leading to the store's basement and storage refrigerator. The refrigerator was behind a large, thick wooden door with a heavy metal handle. Once lifted, the door opens outward and a burst of cold air always spills out of this dark, damp room. The room is filled with shelving from floor to ceiling, usually packed with floral arrangements and recently received flowers that were waiting to "be processed," which meant they needed to be cleaned and brought to the main floor to bloom. The entire room was wooden and damp. The wood flooring felt buoyant, and I imagined the floor had been moist for several decades. In front of the refrigerator entrance there was a large table that was used primarily to make arrangements for weddings and other special events, as well as to clean and organize new floral shipments.

There was an additional small staircase in the basement leading to a sub-basement level, which was divided into several small rooms. These rooms served as storage for tall glass vases, wire easels to hold funeral pieces, an assortment of wicker baskets, candles, marbles, and many other decorative items. One of the sub-basement rooms also held dozens of long cardboard rose boxes labeled by month and year. These boxes were used for long-term filing. At the end of every month, customer orders were removed from the upstairs metal file cabinets and stored in empty rose boxes. Julian said that that his father had kept prior orders this way for tax purposes, and so he did the same. There were seven years of monthly orders in these cardboard rose boxes. The first time Julian asked me to

file the orders in rose boxes, I must have looked at him funny, because he said, “You must think I’m crazy, but this is how we do it.”

The People

All the siblings, both men and women, who manage the Thorny Rose are intimidating in size. The family friend who introduced me to this field site refers to the family members’ physical appearance as “Shrek-like” because of the zaftig combination of muscle and fat each sibling carried. All the siblings talk about the need to lose weight, and several of them went on diets or began working out regularly during my fieldwork. Only Lilia appeared to lose any noticeable weight. Although our daily lunches were not especially healthy—often we would order sandwiches from an Italian shop down the street or Chinese food from the store two doors down—none of the siblings seemed to eat an especially large quantity of food. However, Julian and Nicholas lived with their mother and said that she would cook large meals every night. Tyler said that her husband was, “an excellent cook,” which I translated into unhealthy dinners to account for the calories she must consume to maintain her size.

Julian, the older brother in his early forties, stands at nearly six feet, with expansive shoulders. In the mornings he came to work with matted down wet hair. By the end of the workday he sported a poufy crop of curled hair. He speaks gently to customers and smiles quickly—he is well known and well-liked by many of the long-term customers in the store who sometimes ask for him specifically when they come to order floral arrangements. He wears what appears to be the same pair of jeans and t-shirt daily, and keeps a somewhat raggedy button up plaid shirt at work for when the store gets cold

during the winter months. Despite his hefty appearance, Julian moves rather quickly around the store. About six months prior to the start of my data collection, Julian was in a car accident. His car was totaled and he injured his back. Julian's doctor told him that he should be off his feet for six weeks, attend physical therapy regularly, and avoid lifting heavy objects until further told. Three days after the accident, Julian was back at the store full time with no modifications to his work schedule. Lack of care to his injuries has caused Julian persistent back pain that he experiences particularly in that late afternoons after a day of lifting flowers and being on his feet.

Julian's ailments do not end there. Ironically, Julian has had bad allergies since he was a child. He takes medication daily for watery eyes, sneezing, and an itchy throat. But this has never deterred him from working at Thorny Rose. He told me that he thought, it "was pretty funny that I have allergies," but said that he just deals with it. Julian said that, "this is what the business requires." Coupled with other comments he has made, it seems that Julian feels he has no alternative but to work at the Thorny Rose—not because he is unable to find employment elsewhere, but because he sees his work at the florist as part of a greater work-and-family mission. Although Julian previously worked full time as a department store manager while working part time at the florist, he left his position to work full time at the florist to "continue the family business legacy," as he put it. What this has meant for Julian is continuing to build on the work of his father and grandfather, and also to keep his siblings close together by helping to provide them work opportunities.

Lilia, the oldest female sibling, is in her late thirties. She is the most polished of the siblings. Although she typically wears jeans and a basic blouse to the shop, her cloths

are more fitted and styled than those of her siblings. She has two children under 10 years old. She worked for a decade as a social worker before coming back to the florist about five years earlier to work full time. However, by the end of my data collection, Lilia was working part time because, she said, she could not deal with constant fighting she encountered with her siblings at the store. She had a broad smile and thick curly black hair. Her demeanor was always very friendly and cheery, which is why it was so disconcerting to me the first time she and Nicholas got into a yelling match at work. Lilia seems particularly thoughtful, especially when working with customers. Once, when a woman came to the store to purchase a small bouquet to bring to her son's graveyard, Lilia also made the woman a small corsage, free-of-charge so this mother. Lilia told the woman, "this is for you to look especially beautiful when visiting your son."

Tyler, the youngest sibling is the biggest jokester and gossip of all the siblings. Her siblings describe her as very sweet and a bit naïve. However, these attributes seem to help her connect with customers. Tyler is in her early thirties and is referred to as "Fiona" (the princess in the Shrek movies) by her own siblings. She jokes along with this nickname, but does seem to be sensitive to its negative implications as well. Tyler is the least experienced as a florist and did not spend much time in the shop prior to starting her work at the Thorny Rose two years earlier. As a result, Tyler sometimes seemed uncertain about her work and often asks others what they thought about her arrangements. While everyone at the florist routinely asked each other their opinions of finished arrangements, Tyler seemed like she is looking for approval of her work rather than feedback. Her siblings also joke that Tyler loves the "the most beautiful pink and purple flowers," because when making arrangements, Tyler will sometimes only use the

remaining pink and purple flowers in the shop without considering the flowers needed in other arrangements. She also uses the flowers with the least imperfections, even those that are less visible in arrangements in which flawed flowers should be used. Although occasionally the siblings get angered at Tyler's lack of strategy when making her arrangements, her siblings usually joke about it—when all the purple flowers are gone, Lilia has said, “Was Tyler making arrangements this morning?”

Nicholas: “Yeah, why? They look good.”

Lilia: “I figured. All the purple flowers are gone.”

Tyler is also thought to be a bit of a lazy worker. She actually lives in an apartment upstairs from the shop, and periodically “disappears” from the florist throughout the day, heading upstairs to see her husband, who does not work. (He also can no longer work at the florist because he has had too many work-related fights with Tyler's family). Sometimes at lunch Tyler will return to the shop, after running upstairs, with a plate of meat, rice and vegetables her husband has cooked. Although Tyler is still responsible for some of the hourly workers, including an employee affectionately called the Kid (only full-time non-family member who handles flowers), the drivers, and seasonal hires, she acts more like an employee. She has not assumed responsibility of any particular niche area of the business, and typically asks her siblings what work she needs to do, rather than taking initiative to start on projects. She is also prone to leaning on the various counters and work desks in the shop, seemingly daydreaming. When asked what she's doing when she's leaning, she'll typically respond that she's tired. Tyler used to work as an art therapist and still looks for positions in that field. She interviewed for at least one art therapy job while I was working at the florist. However, she was still working at the florist when I stopped collecting data.

Nicholas has the biggest personality of all the siblings and is perhaps the most complex. Nicholas presents himself as a tough manager, which is bolstered by his physical presence. Although he is shorter than Julian, at about 5'10", Nicholas is a very strong guy with a high level of expertise in many areas of the floral business. Nicholas worked for the Thorny Rose in high school, and then full time once he graduated. However, because of family feuding and a lack of opportunity for personal growth at the florist, Nicholas left. He went to work for several years for a florist specializing in weddings in Florida. There, he said he was able to offer his boss both "physical skill and my ability to make arrangements. That's not a combination people usually have." He had done very well in his position, and even bought a home in Florida. However, once the recession hit, his boss needed to cut Nicholas's position, and Nicholas could no longer afford to keep his house. Nicholas returned to his mother's house up north, but decided not to return to the Thorny Rose. Instead, Nicholas worked for another florist. After a few years, his father was diagnosed with a terminal illness and Julian asked Nicholas return to the Thorny Rose.

Nicholas is the quintessential manager that barks orders at employees all day, especially at the Kid. When he hears some of the employees, including the Kid, in the basement laughing, Nicholas asked, "Why is he laughing?!"

Julian: "Uhh, maybe someone told a joke. What's wrong?"

Nicholas: "If he's happy, he's not working hard enough." After which Nicholas went to the basement to follow up on the rate of work of the employees.

Some of the part time helpers, including the drivers, call Nicholas "the General." And sometimes after Nicholas has yelled at the employees, Julian and Lilia jokingly call him, "el diablo blanco." Employees as well as the siblings have also nicknamed Nicholas,

“Pops.” Even though Julian sees himself as the father figure in the family, he says, “I’m too nice.” The siblings use family terminology to note how Nicholas has taken on the role of the strong patriarch—at least as it pertains to the non-family employees. Despite this tough demeanor, Nicholas is often self-reflective. He has told me that he has a lot of good ideas for the store, but he “has trouble saying it in ways that get my family on board. And then I get angry because I don’t think they’re listening.” Occasionally after getting angry at one of the employees, Nicholas has told me, “this time, I had no right to yell at him.” Sometimes Nicholas would apologize to an employee for raising his voice, and then follow up with a rationale for why he yelled—typically relating to the efficiency of the workers.

Nicholas told me on many occasions that he could make more money working for another florist, exclusively doing wedding work like he did in Florida. But he said that, “Julian and I work hard all the time here for our family and for the legacy of this place.” Nicholas often uses his father’s name in reference to how things ought to be done at the shop, and why the siblings should be working harder or more efficiently. Of all the family members, Nicholas seems to revere his father the most because of his “good business sense” and “willingness to do whatever is needed for the business,” as Nicholas put it. Thus, Nicholas told me on many occasions that, “customers always come first,” even before going home to one’s own family at the end of the day. The themes of family and business values were a point of conflict between Nicholas and his other siblings. On one occasion, when Julian gave Tyler an afternoon off to see her daughter in a school play, Nicholas told me, audibly enough for Julian to hear: “You know that Julian always

puts family before business. Always.” And Julian responded, “You always put money before family.”

Chapter 4: Organizational Goals and Cultural Performances

Review of Idiocultures

It has become common to understand actors' capacity to operate in organizations as constrained or enabled by organizational structures—social hierarchies, rules of operations, codified objectives and policies, etc. An emphasis on these generalized structural pressures fails to provide an intimate perspective of the way actors form and sustain relationships inside organizations and their motivation to work collaboratively towards organizational goals. In this dissertation I conceptualize structures as organized through an interaction order (Goffman 1983a). Instead of a top-down view of structural influence on actors' activities, an interaction order approach takes a bottom-up perspective. Within ongoing group interactions, small groups develop cultures. Action, meaning, authority, inequality, and even emotions are rooted in nuanced microstructures of small group dynamics (Fine 2012). Rather than looking for firm-level structures to provide direction for actors' activities, small group cultures, or idiocultures, provide rules, guidelines, and sets of responsibilities that help actors understand how to relate to one another in their organizations.

While cultures develop within groups, the creation of these cultures does not come spontaneously, emerging *de novo* when interacting group members first come together. According to Fine and Fields (2008:134), culture is established through the creation of traditions, shared references, and customs within ongoing performances that organize interactions. As members interact, their groups develop shared values, background knowledge, status systems, and routines, constituting a normative culture.

I have already contended that small group cultures create order and stability in small businesses. Order generated through idiocultures enables small businesses to operate effectively in the absence of formal rules and regulations. I further claim that, although group cultures are created and recreated from ongoing interactions, affiliations, and expectations, a group's culture does not provide a single, stable operating framework. Instead, small firm cultures enable actors to operate in a unitary way because it provides flexibility for actors to adjust to the practical internal and external pressures of operating a small business. Actors must adjust their practices as well as their relationships to one another to enact different forms of organizational stability. A successful firm culture provides actors with several organizing performances that enable actors to adapt to various pressures and coordinate their work in order to accomplish firm goals. Based on my empirical findings, I suggest that three primary organizing performances, or operations, provide ongoing firm stability: routine business performances, routine crisis performances, and routine growth performances.

Firms' Primary Goals

Firms organize to accomplish specific organizational missions, objectives, and goals. Although firms may have a variety of big, long-term missions and objectives, all firms produce some sort of products or services for a consumer or business. Successful production of these goods or services is required for organizations to achieve their missions. Moreover, in order for a business to be economically prosperous and maintain its viability, it must organize its resources around the development of its products or

services. I consider each firm's perception of the successful production of goods and services to be a firm's primary goal.

Each small firm develops a generic, abstract perception of what qualifies as a successful product or service. The criteria of a successful product or service was reiterated in a variety of ways in each of my field sites—sometimes it was stated outright by managers and owners to employees, sometimes managers “reminded themselves” of their firm's primary goal during times of organizational decision-making, and for those organizations that had employee handbooks (ElderCare and AeroGears), the organization's primary goal was articulated in written summaries. Based on repeated assertions by multiple members of each organization in formal and informal interviews, as well as conversations and activities I documented in my field notes, I developed representative concise statements of each organizations' primary goal:

Rolling Hills: Tasty and attractive produce

AeroGears: A precise part

ElderCare: Compassionate care

Thorny Rose: Beautiful arrangements

Small group cultures constitute the organizing of firm resources towards achieving firms' primary goal. If organizational actors could churn out the same product or service day-in and day-out without any problematic encounters, then a singular way of organizing would be sufficient. However, organizations do not operate without interruptions, crises, or desires for growth. As a result, organizational actors must shift their resources, alter their practices, and adjust the way they relate to one another in efforts to engage in ongoing product or service development.

To help explain the three organizing frames that exist at each firm, enabling persistent generation of order, I borrow terminology from research on routines by

Feldman and Pentland (2003). Feldman and Pentland characterize routines using two concepts, ostensive (abstract patterns) and performative (specific actions). Something that is ostensive is characterized as “abstract patterns that participants use to guide, account for and refer to specific” ways of operating (Pentland and Feldman 2005:795). According to these researchers, something that is ostensive provides a generalized outline for guiding performance. In the case of routines, as Pentland and Feldman apply the concept, they suggest that rules and written procedures can serve as a proxy for the ostensive aspect of a routine (Pentland and Feldman 2005). An example provided by these authors is the hiring routine. The process of hiring can be referenced in an abstract way, involving “attracting, screening and choosing applicants” (Pentland and Feldman 2005:796). These three activities provide generalized guidance for accomplishing the task of bringing a new employee into an organization. Most organizational actors will generally understand what each task entails to accomplish the hiring goal.

However, the enactment or performance of an ostensive routine may involve high levels of variation. Performances fluctuate depending on the way actors construct the activity from a repertoire of possibilities (Feldman and Pentland 2003). Individual level factors, including individual skills, habits, and interpretations, influence the way a routine is carried out. In addition, organizational level variations as well as societal level pressures that change over the course of a year, also influence the ways a routine, such as hiring a new employee, is performed at any particular time. As Pentland and Feldman describe, performances are specific actions taken by specific people at specific times. Moreover, the decision to select from the available repertoires is not made in isolation. Instead, the choice of action is made in reference to the activities and choices of actors

who are also engaged in organizational routines. Thus, it is suggested that there is an improvisatory nature to organizational routine performance (Feldman 2003). Actors must attend to the actions of performers with whom they work and interact with to coordinate the completion of a routine. In this sense, actors must improvise, adjust to, negotiate with, and complement those around them to successfully perform a routine.

Applying the concepts of ostensive and performative to the research in this dissertation, I suggest that each organization's primary goal, or perception of a successful product or service, constitutes the ostensive aspect of how resources are organized and order is generated in organizations. These simplified, abstract goals are known to all organizational actors, either through explicit writing in employee handbooks and/or through repetition in verbal exchanges in everyday conversations. However, these abstract goals only provide a generalization of how resources should be organized to accomplish work. The ordering performances I find at all of my field sites demonstrate three operations of small business ostensive goals. As noted, these performances involve the rearrangement of resources, adjustments of relationships, and the negotiations of practices in order for firm actors to accomplish firm goals. I further argue that within each of these three performances, there are violations of expectations and conflicts between organizational actors that challenge organizational stability.

What is critical to this story is that small group cultures provide the histories, values, status systems, emotions, and meanings that give rise to the three types of performances that constitute the enactment of small business goals. Idiocultures provide organizational actors with common meanings and legitimizing frames to enable actors to effectively work as a group to perform the organization's ostensive goals. It is these

microstructures of small group dynamics that gives rise to the various repertoires of action for each of these performances.

What's to Follow

In the next three chapters, I discuss each of the three organizing frames, or performances, that generate order in small businesses. I provide examples from the four small businesses I researched to demonstrate how each firm developed practices and strategies of operations to maintain firm stability during a variety of firm activities. Evidently, variations in characteristics of each field site, outlined in the previous chapter, significantly influence the way that idiocultures are formed and perpetuated at each business. As a result, I discuss significant factors that influence the performance frames of one small business that may have no relevance in another.

The different themes that I present as critically important for each business developed from the methodological coding practice. As previously discussed, I created initial codes for my field notes and interviews and then reviewed, reorganized, and recoded those field notes as issues appeared to play a significant role in the way organizational actors thought about their work and performed their jobs. For example, as will be discussed in the next chapter, an issue like identity arose as an important factor that influenced the performance of group culture at Rolling Hills and to an extent at Thorny Rose, but was not relevant at AeroGears or ElderCare.

Another important difference in the idioculture descriptions at each field site is in the relationships between organizational managers (or leaders) and employees, the physical space shared between managers and employees, and the work responsibilities of managers and employees. For example, the sole leader at Rolling Hills often works side

by side with her farmhand volunteers. The three primary managers at AeroGears that plan jobs, handle sales, and complete administrative work, but do little manual labor, share the same small space with the machinists that exclusively work the metal. At ElderCare, the owner and the administrative assistant both assume important management roles completing administrative tasks, but nearly all of the employees work outside the office, independently, physically caring for elderly clients in the clients' homes. Finally, at Thorny Rose, each of the four siblings work all aspects of the business and they constitute the primary work force, since the few employees are part time or seasonal help. These work and relationship variations are of course common in small businesses and fall within the definition of small business established in Chapter 2 (using Scase and Goffee's (1980) terminology of small employers and owner-directors which include employers working alongside their employees and those who do not but handle all administrative work). Although these differing arrangements of daily work responsibilities and relationships among managers and between managers and employees play a significant role in each firm's culture, clear patterns of goal performance are consistent between each small business.

Having already provided the initial descriptions of each firm's history, setting, people and my own responsibilities as a participant observer, the next chapter will provide an intricate and nuanced analysis of how each firm conducts business under normal, or routine business operations. This analysis of the *routine business operations* will include examinations of leadership styles, accomplishment of daily work responsibilities, and perceptions of idioculture violations. *Routine business performances*, discussed in Chapter 5, are performances most commonly enacted in organizations.

Routine crisis performances and *routine growth performances*, examined in Chapter 6 and 7 respectively, can be considered deviations from the routine business operations.

Chapter 5: Routine Business Performance

In order for organizational actors to successfully coordinate performances to enact a firm's ostensive goals (listed in the previous chapter), firm employees must be able to share organizational meanings. Shared meanings develop over time through ongoing interaction and negotiation. Once firm actors develop a common history with shared references, they generate coordinated activities that they all come to know. According to Fine (2012:223), "[i]f the negotiated order is not disrupted, it is continually reproduced, taken-for-granted, and maintained through the routinized interactions of the participants (Fine 1992; Becker 1995; Snow 2001, 2003)." I label the performance of the "taken-for-granted" negotiated order at each firm as *routine business operations*. Below are the performative routine business operations of each organization:

Rolling Hills: Holistic work activities

AeroGears: Stick to your task

ElderCare: Collaborative efforts

Thorny Rose: Whatever needs to get done

The routine business operations at each firm is the ordering of resources and the relationships among actors that enables the accomplishment of firms' goals during times of organizational calm. This means that a firm is not experiencing any unexpected internal turmoil or duress, there are no active exogenous shocks the firm must respond to, and the firm is not engaged in activities aimed at growth. In some respects, the routine business operations constitute the most comfortable way of operating for firm owners, managers, and employees. It does not necessarily mean that it is the ideal way to operate (in terms of efficiency), but instead, the routine business operations have developed from, and is perpetuated by, the group's idioculture.

I developed an understanding of the routine business operations at each organization by identifying how firm actors described their relationships to their coworkers, how they answered my questions or concerns about how I should perform my work, and through observations of how actors interacted with each other during times of calm. Nevertheless, routine business performances, like all performances, are subject to interpretation. Interpretations led to performance variations at my field sites, which occasionally led to conflicts, or violations of performance expectations. These violations sometimes resulted in clashes between employees or between employees and managers. Despite performance variations and occasional conflicts, as long as firms do not experience unexpected internal duress or external shocks, organizational order is generated and maintained effectively by firm actors according to routine business operations.

In the rest of this chapter, I will describe the routine business performance at each of my field sites that enable employees to generate order. I provide an overall summary of each firm's performance by identifying the "critical components" of the idioculture.

Rolling Hills

Primary Goal: *Tasty and attractive produce*

Performance: *Holistic work activities*

Critical Components:

1. *Penelope, the farm owner, assumed a motherly role; although sometimes conflicts arose when Penelope attempted to assert an alternative position as boss.*

2. *According to Penelope, performing holistic work activities means that farmhands should learn through doing, experience farming as spiritual work, but also require ongoing guidance.*

3. *According to the farmhands, performing holistic work activities means that farmhands should learn through doing, but once instructions are given, they are capable of competently completing tasks by relying on other farmhands, without interference from Penelope. This discrepancy in interpretation of the routine business performance has led volunteers to demonstrate resistance to some of Penelope's directions.*

4. According to both Penelope and the farmhands, holistic work activities also included opportunities for farmhands to pursue personal, social, and academic interests while on the farm.

Leadership as Mothering

Penelope would often refer to the farmhands as “children” or “my children,” and positioned herself as the mother of the house. Rather than taking the role of boss and designating responsibilities as the source of organizational authority, Penelope typically approached her interactions with the farmhands as a mother. For example, in the mornings Penelope was typically awake early, around 5:30am, picking up Filipe from his house and stopping by one of the cafes she sells her produce to (and that provide her with day-old sandwiches and pastries which we would often eat for breakfast or lunch). Upon returning home, she would make oatmeal in the kitchen, often singing or humming quietly, but audibly enough that it was clear she was trying to gently coax awake the volunteers. By 6:30am, Penelope would ring a bell and then sing her “Good Morning” song with words and a melody that would change each day: “Good morning, my children, rise...come gather your strength for a day of harvest, a day for harvesting the land...” The guys usually grumbled awake around me and would jokingly whimper to themselves: “Pleeeasse stop, pleeeeee just shut up.”

Penelope not only referred to us as her children but also often treated us like children. For example, when there were a dozen or more farmhands at the house, our evening gathering would occasionally get loud. Penelope would come down from her bedroom and say, “lower your volume.” One morning at breakfast she said: “All you children were so quiet last night.” A few days later, we were “scolded” when Penelope commented that that we were all so loud that she and her husband, Bob, had trouble

sleeping. In another instance, one time when Aiko, Caitlin, and Penelope were cooking dinner, about six of us were sitting at the kitchen table chatting. Penelope turned to us and said, “[I]f you’re not helping, take your conversation to the living room.” Her comment immediately made me feel like I was being shooed out of the space where adults were working, and I was being told to go play in the children’s room.

Finally, in interviews, farmhands told me that they typically felt that Penelope treated them as children. One farmhand jokingly commented that she came to the farm, “to get away from my mother!” and she felt that Penelope had come to represent someone she had hoped to leave behind for the summer.

Accomplishing Daily Work – Maintaining the Appearance of Choice

Although diverse motivations brought volunteers to the farm—from those who simply wanted a socially-engaging summer activity, to those who were looking for room and board, to the occasional aspiring farmer—Penelope did not have much difficulty getting volunteers to complete the most important farm task, which was harvesting enough crops for weekly CSA customers.

The required work divided among each farmhand was decided in the mornings at breakfast time. Penelope had a dry erase board in the kitchen that was perched on a chair. Each morning she listed out the day’s various tasks on the board. The list included vegetables or fruit that should be harvested (along with specific quantities needed to supply to all CSA members), as well as other tasks, such as collecting goat dung, turning over soil, weeding, spreading coffee grinds on blueberry bushes, etc. During breakfast, Penelope would go through the list and ask farmhands which tasks they wanted to complete. As individuals volunteered, she would put that person’s name next to their

assigned task. After breakfast, the dry erase board was moved to the CSA pick up garage area so that we could all reference the list to keep track of the produce quantities collected, and take on additional tasks once we finished our initial responsibilities.

Although Penelope presented this morning ritual as a holistic, mutually-agreed upon process, Penelope sometimes vetoed volunteers' suggested assignments—this typically occurred because a volunteer had previously improperly completed the task they volunteered for (and as Penelope told me, she “can’t trust some people to do things correctly”), or when a new volunteer did not yet have the proper experience. Volunteers who were on the farm for a long time came to recognize that Penelope often had specific jobs she wanted certain people to volunteer for—although the level of task designation heightened the day before and the day of CSA pickup, as will be described in the next chapter. When Penelope did not get those people to volunteer, she simply asked them to complete the task. If we resisted the assignment, Penelope would gently ask again. I never saw anyone fail to capitulate to a second request from Penelope to complete some task that day. Those of us who came to recognize this morning ritual would joke about how dedicated she was to the pretense of actually asking people to volunteer for certain tasks. Nonetheless, we did not put up much resistance to working on assigned tasks because we believed that certain activities did require experience and were needed for successful CSAs. Thus, even if we did not want to complete an activity, we came to see the requests made on us by Penelope to be part of our obligation for working for our mother-leader.

Volunteers' Creation of a Holistic Performance

New farmhands were typically assigned to work alongside an experienced farmhand, or at least someone who previously, successfully completed that particular task. Even though most new volunteers did not believe there was very much to learn to “simply picking fruit off a tree or tugging some vegetables out of the ground” as one new farmhand referred to the task of harvesting, the work of gathering each particular fruit or vegetable involved some level of knowledge and skill. Experienced farmhands trained all new volunteers. This included teaching new farmhands how to dig up carrots without breaking them, how to bundle kale without scarring them, how to pick cherry tomatoes without break the skin, how to select cucumbers that had finished growing, etc.

Penelope created this basic teaching system. She told me that while she would prefer to be the primary teacher for each new volunteer, she did not have the time. While Penelope would sometimes make suggestions to experienced farmhands at breakfast about how to improve the work of certain tasks, the hands-on training was delegated to volunteers whom Penelope trusted. Farmhands relied on each other for advice and support when they needed to understand how they could best complete work on the farm. Moreover, farmhands came to understand their routine work of harvesting as something that could be completed independent of Penelope’s oversight.

Penelope’s Creation of a Holistic Performance

When new volunteers came to the farm, she made it clear during a brief orientation that she believed the farm was a place where volunteers could learn about the land and see their work as spiritual, while also a place for volunteers to engage in

activities that interested them. The meaning of this introduction, which I received and I overheard being given to new volunteers, was continuously reinforced in conversations we had over breakfast and dinner. At each meal, Penelope would recite a spiritual prayer, typically from an Indian text. During the meal, we would comment about the flavors of the different vegetables and about which farmhands picked which vegetables that were a part of our meal. Penelope would also pepper the conversation with information about the Steiner philosophy of education and farming, and she would comment on how much each of us were learning and growing as a result of the work we did on the farm.

Penelope's orientation of new farmhands to Rolling Hills, the spiritual overtones of our work, the ongoing conversations of farming philosophies, the farmhands' own discussions about harvesting and the meals it produced, and our regular communal gathering for meals, all led us to continuously create a culture of holistic performance. During times of routine business operations, Penelope and the volunteers appeared to understand and enjoy their positions and responsibilities at the farm. We all appeared to seamlessly complete our daily farm work, and the farmhands relied on each other for assistance to accomplish the necessary work. However, this routine performance did not operate without missteps.

Volunteers' Identity on the Farm

The combination of Penelope's treatment of the volunteers as children, along with her designating the responsibility of training to other farmhands rather than assuming the responsibility herself, led volunteers to consider themselves as "assistants," supporting Penelope's interests, rather than as "farmers" with skill and authority. However, it did not

seem that there was anything particularly negative about this identity. As noted, while volunteers had some interest in working the land, most of the farmhands chose to volunteer to get out of their families' homes for the summer, receive college credit, be in an environment where they could be introspective, socialize, be nearby a major city, or complete required volunteering hours. Only rarely was there a volunteer whose main ambition was to learn about agriculture and farming. Identifying as assistants gave farmhands psychological distance from the work at Rolling Hills to primarily engage in interests outside of farm work, and helped to create their perception of a holistic performance that emphasized personal desires and socialization over farm work itself.

Violations and Resistance – Balancing “Free Will” and Precise Work

Although Penelope created her position as a mother and established our relationship to her as her family, at times she asserted herself as a boss and treated us as employees, jolting our understanding of our group culture. Even if Penelope herself was not aware of it, she created a dual role—that of mother and boss—even if she preferred to act as mother. For example, sometimes Penelope commented at breakfast or lunch about our responsibilities on the farm by referring to the “contracts” that we signed when each of us first came to the farm—a review of the farm’s rules which each of us did sign on our first day volunteering. Farmhands were sometimes taken aback by this reference, evidenced by confused or angered glances the volunteers would make at each other when this sort of language was used. It seemed like the established relationship that we had formed with Penelope as our mother and completing our task through a holistic performance was violated by her suggestion that we should complete our responsibilities

because of a signed contract. Instead, volunteers completed their responsibilities because we felt we had an obligation to each other and we respected Penelope's goals for the farm, even if they weren't exactly our own.

This dual role was made more complex because Penelope knew that without the work of volunteers, her farm could not operate. She felt that she needed to be careful with how much she could request from the volunteers because we were unpaid. Far from seamless, Penelope was often unable to determine how to express the need for farmhands to work effectively, while giving us the space to accomplish our work in a holistic, mutually supportive, and self-exploratory manner. For example, one morning after Penelope divided that day's responsibilities among each farmhand and emphasized the importance of working efficiently and carefully to complete the harvest, she ended with: "That's the pep talk, but you're all volunteers, so do what you want to do. Free will." Most of the volunteers smiled, recognizing the confusing and sensitive position Penelope was in. For those of us who were at the farm for a while, we knew there was little that Penelope could or would do if we did not fulfill our responsibilities according to her expectations, despite any pep talks from her position as boss.

Occasionally, when volunteers felt that the business performance and even their identity in the group might have been violated, volunteers actively resisted any changes to the established routine performance. For example, although Penelope selected "trustworthy," experienced farmhands to train new volunteers, there was a lot of variation in people's ability to teach. In addition, each experienced volunteer had his or her own particular way of performing harvesting tasks. Volunteers had come to see their responsibilities as providing instruction and support for their fellow volunteers,

independent of Penelope's input. When new volunteers had questions about the work or needed help to complete a particular task, they could rely on other farmhands for assistance. Even though Penelope helped to create these relationships by assigning experienced volunteers the task of teaching, she maintained particular ways she wanted produce to be harvested. Thus, rather than taking a hands-off approach to the daily work volunteers put in to completing their harvest responsibilities, Penelope seemed to endlessly make suggestions to the volunteers. In turn, volunteers expressed to me that they felt Penelope was micromanaging their work. Volunteers often suggested that the farming work was not so complex as to require micromanaging, yet as one volunteer noted, "Penelope was particular about the way she wanted everything done."

Objectively, Penelope had useful suggestions for the farmhands based on her many years of farming experience. For example, there were certain ways to cut kale near their roots to optimize "the look" of the leaves, and the method of bundling the kale leaves together so they would not be damaged was a delicate process that required use of one kind of rubber band instead of another type that was used for carrots (and a metal twist tie should definitely not be used because it was ineffective at holding kale together and much better for bundling herbs). It was also critical when the sun was out during collection that the kale was covered by a cotton cloth and picking should be performed as quickly as possible to minimize wilting of the picked leaves. In addition, there were optimal ways to physically position one's body—like how to bend one's knees or lean forward in a certain way, or how to position your hand to easily collect leaves, etc. Such physical dexterity and endurance was important in order to work in the sun for seven hours while performing repetitive work. Nevertheless, the routine business performances

developed at the farm, and the relationships that came to be established and reaffirmed over time, relied on the interdependence of the volunteers and the exclusion of mother Penelope.

Penelope would offer suggestions for improvements as the volunteers brought produce from the field in large plastic buckets to the CSA pickup area garage for sorting. Volunteers had a variety of responses to Penelope's suggestions, from nodding vigorously in an attempt to speed up the conversation so they could go back to the field, to patient listening and a head nod, to more verbal responses like, "I know" or "Sure, I'll see what I can do." Regardless of what was suggested, volunteers were nearly always irritated by these recommendations. As one farmhand said, "Penelope likes to micromanage and complain about our work." One farmhand noted that, "It's not like we're giving her bad stuff. And none of the [CSA] people complain about anything they pick up." Many of the farmhands commented on the fact that since the CSA customers were satisfied with their produce, the farmhands did not believe there to be a valid reason to alter their harvesting activities.

Infrequently did any farmhand adjust their work to coincide with Penelope's recommendations. As a result, Penelope would sometimes confide in me about how frustrated she was that "nobody listens...but what can I do?" It was evident that she did not recognize that establishing herself as the farm's mother and the routine business performance she helped to create did not provide her the authority to make certain demands on the volunteers. In addition, Penelope did not want to irritate the volunteers for fear that they would not complete their work. And finally, her personal philosophy led

her to believe that the volunteers should want to contribute to and experience the farm work as a learning and self-discovery tool.

“It’s Not My Job”—Coercive Attempts at Getting Volunteers to Comply

Penelope had one strategy she used to try to get the volunteers to complete their work according to her recommendations. She asked volunteers whom she believed were the most responsible, including myself, Aiko, and a hard working girl named Caitlin, to check on the other volunteers’ work to make sure they were harvesting in a manner that Penelope would approve. The nature of the relationship I had with my fellow volunteers was one of mutual respect, obligation, and assistance. We were all peers with equal status in the group. All three of us felt uncomfortable with Penelope’s suggestion that we should “check up” on the other volunteers. Even though Aiko was just as reluctant and uncomfortable as the rest of us, she did make some recommendations to the other farmhands—but articulated these recommendations as requests from Penelope. For example, I heard her say, “Penelope would like it if you....” Or “It’s not me, but Penelope asked if I could tell you....” Her advice was taken seriously by the farmhands. I do not believe volunteers listened to her because the recommendations were initiated by Penelope, but because they came from Aiko. Aiko was very hardworking, had been on the farm longer than any other volunteer, and it was known that she aspired to a career in agriculture. If there was one person among the volunteers who was in an authority position, it was Aiko.

Nevertheless, Aiko resented the fact that she had to assume this responsibility. She told me, “It’s not my job to tell them what to do. That’s Penelope’s job!” And in fact,

when Aiko felt that Penelope asked her too many times to speak to the farmhands on her behalf, Aiko told Penelope, “I think it’s better for *you* to tell them what *you* want them to do” [Aiko’s emphasis]. Penelope replied with a meek, “Okay.” But any future recommends she made to volunteers were met with continued resistance.

Conclusion on Routine Business Performance at Rolling Hills

The routine business operations at Rolling Hills were based on perceptions of holistic work activities, although the group of volunteers had a different meaning of this concept than Penelope. Penelope’s philosophy about farming and education, coupled with establishing herself as the mother of the farm, led her to believe that holistic work was about learning by doing while providing ongoing support for her volunteers. The volunteer farmhands, whose desire to be on the farm came from personal, social, and academic interests distinct from learning about and experiencing farm activities, also believed their work was a holistic performance. They could rely on each other to complete the necessary work on the farm as Penelope’s assistants, supporting her passion for the farm and her CSA business, while exploring their own personal and social interests. Rather than looking for Penelope’s ongoing guidance, volunteers sought the mentorship of other farmhands to learn the skills to harvest. They continued to turn to other volunteers for companionship and ongoing assistance to complete their harvesting responsibilities. Because of the farmhands’ reliance on each other, they felt Penelope’s regular recommendations for completing their work to be a violation of the relationship and the culture established on the farm. Thus, in their ongoing interactions, volunteers resisted Penelope’s attempts to assert herself as a boss, rather than as a mother figure.

The routine business operations at Rolling Hills was a performance that provided the farmhands a sense of authority and control through the interdependence they created for each other as a group, rather than seeking guidance from an authority figure. Their motivation to complete their responsibilities on the farm stemmed from their interest in helping Penelope maintain her farm, just as much as it was about the volunteers' responsibilities to one another. This is not to say that all farmhands felt an ongoing sense of responsibility to the group without free rider problems. In fact, there was often a volunteer or two at any given time that did not perform his or her work as expected by Penelope or the other volunteers. There was little Penelope could do to encourage a free rider to work, but among the farmhands, this person was often excluded from volunteers' leisure activities (i.e. going to a movie, planning a trip to the city nearby, etc.). This exclusion was a demonstration of how the lack of compliance for the group's establishment of work responsibilities and relational expectations was a violation of the group's norm, and something the farmhands deemed undesirable.

The ongoing construction of this ephemeral collection of volunteers as interdependent hard working assistants was enabled by long term, dedicated volunteers. These workers had the experience and skill to train new volunteers. According to Penelope, there's "always been at least one special soul who's around for [six months or more] to help with the work." Without one of these "special souls," I believe Penelope would need to change the way she initiates new volunteers, and may find the routine business performance altered. However, it may also give Penelope an opportunity to reposition her role from that of a mother to that of a boss—although the likelihood of a

transition of that primary position is low, given her philosophical stance about how the farm should serve as a place of education for the volunteers as much as it is a business.

AeroGears

Primary Goal: *A precise part*

Performance: *Stick to your task*

Critical Components:

1. *Jack, the floor manager, is a confrontational leader whose aggression and emotional responses to employees discourage collaboration among floor workers.*

2. *Leo, the factory owner, is aware of Jack's shortcomings and acknowledges Jack's attitude and behavior has resulted in serious HR problems in the factory. Nevertheless, Leo does nothing to require Jack to change his style of management.*

3. *Factory floor workers would rather overlook obvious mistakes to a machined part moving through the factory than call attention to an issue out of concern for being chastised by Jack. Instead, employees simply stick to their specific task.*

4. *Alex, the quality assurance manager is the person responsible for creating and implementing standardized quality assurance processes (taking some control out of "the heads of Leo and Jack"). He believes floor workers should have more authority and work collaboratively, but that the managers should stick to their tasks.*

5. *Resistance from Jack and Leo to Alex's processes stems from the owner and floor manager's concern for losing authority and power. This resistance stymies the organization's potential for growth while perpetuating employees' disgruntled attitudes and failure to collaborate.*

Leadership Through Fear and Paternalism

Employees at AeroGears are constantly concerned about criticism from Jack, the floor manager, regarding the way they are working (e.g. how they are using the machinery or how busy or attentive they look while working) or the quality of the parts they produce (e.g. does the part fall within its acceptable variance, has the part been produced without scratches or other defects). Employees were very hesitant to divulge too much insight about their opinions of AeroGears and the work they did during our interviews, but it was clear that there was discontent among employees.

One employee I interviewed who had worked at AeroGears for ten years was representative of the comments I received from most employees I spoke with. When I asked him what has influenced his decision to stay at AeroGears, he smiled and said, "I like it." And then he said, "That's what I'll tell you, but that's not the truth." I pressed him to tell me what he meant, and he explained himself by saying that, "What it is, is that if there's a better opportunity out there, I would take it. That's true for anybody in any job." However, his qualification of a "better opportunity" was not an explanation for why he does not like the job. I asked him to tell me about his daily work on the factory floor and his interactions with Jack. He said that, "you mostly hear feedback when you've done something wrong..." He laughed and then added, "I mean, occasionally when something went well you'll get a 'good job' or something, but not too often." Another employee gently described Jack as "difficult to get along with." I knew these discussions were sugar-coated and none of the employees felt comfortable discussing the specific issues they had with Jack. I believe this reticence was due to concern for a possible reprimand from Jack if he were to find out that something was negatively said about him that might undermine his authority.

Once I established a rapport with Leo, the factory owner, he confided in me his opinion of Jack.

Leo: "I've had employees that have left this place, good employees, that have left because of Jack."

Eric: "How do you know it was because of Jack?"

Leo: "They told me. They told me if it wasn't for him, they would still be working here..They know I run a good business, this is a very clean factory, I'm fair to my employees...but Jack's attitude is a problem."

...

Eric: "So why do you keep him as the floor manager then?"

Leo: “Have you ever seen anyone work as hard as him? That’s why I keep him...He’s here early every morning, and on Saturdays, and is usually the last to leave...but I know he’s a problem. He’s been a problem for years.”

Alex, the quality assurance manager, often spoke to me about Jack’s acerbic tone with employees. One employee (who was later terminated after a verbal confrontation he had with Jack) spoke about how Jack’s attitude made the factory an unpleasant work environment. When I asked Leo why he has not done anything to change the work conditions on the floor, he said that he has tried several times to send Jack to management and leadership training classes, but Jack refused to go. I thought it was interesting that Leo would not make it mandatory for Jack to get training, given that Leo is the owner and he knows Jack’s attitude has resulted in poor employee retention. Nevertheless, Leo’s attitude toward Jack contributes to the routine business performance of sticking to your task to complete the organization’s goal—Leo maintains his distance from this issue and does not interfere with Jack’s treatment of employees.

In interviews I had with two consultants who previously worked with AeroGears and conducted limited on-site employee training, both were well aware of what they perceived to be Jack’s negative influence on the organization. One consultant said he suggested that Leo send Jack for anger management counseling, and believed that he was one of the factors holding the company back from growth. The other suggested to me that Jack “must have some sort of dirt on Leo, or knows some secret Leo doesn’t want to get out,” as the only rational explanation for why Jack would still be employed at AeroGears. It is clear to all employees that Jack’s behavior, although objectionable by nearly all company employees, is tacitly approved by AeroGears’ owner. Despite Leo’s clear understanding of the negative impact Jack has on the employees at the factory, he has

come to rationalize that the qualities Jack brings to the job, namely, hard work and loyalty, outweighs his deleterious effects on workers.

In contrast to Jack, who instilled a combination of fear, agitation, and frustration among the workers, employees labeled Leo as a “good guy” as one machinist said, “who is a smart businessman.” Leo prided himself on having developed a core group of dedicated, hard working employees. He noted on numerous occasions during my time at AeroGears that he, “hadn’t fired anyone since 1983.” He said that even during “the very difficult times of 2008 and 2009, I didn’t let anyone go.” Referencing the economic recession, he said that instead of firing anyone, he cut everyone’s hours to spread the burden of diminished work (and pay) among all employees. Leo said that he went into debt “trying to find money to pay” his employees until the economy recovered. In interviews with employees who worked at AeroGears during this time, they spoke about Leo in paternalistic terms. Nearly all employees commented on how Leo “really took care of us.” Several employees said that, “he’s a really good businessman.” One employee noted that, “Leo was able to keep this place going during the recession when a lot of places went out of business. Now we’re getting their business.” Employees who worked for Leo for many years spoke of their esteem for him, and in turn, employees reciprocated with dedication to their jobs and to AeroGears.

Despite Leo’s status as the firm’s owner, his daily responsibilities in the organization lay outside the coordination of workflow and production. It was Jack’s position as the floor manager that most significantly influenced the way employees related to each other and the way they organized their work.

Accomplishing Daily Work – Jack’s Rule

From my desk on the second floor next to the quality assurance manager, I would often hear Jack’s heavy-footed climb up the stairs to get a coffee refill and complain about the work of the machinists. Jack would typically say that someone was “not listening” or “not thinking.” In addition to venting these grievances with the upstairs managers, I witnessed Jack get angry at employees on the floor and criticize their work—they were either working too slowly, making too many mistakes, or not working on the right part.

There was a high level of interaction between the workers and Jack because all orders needed to pass through Jack before they were released on the floor. However, employees still sought to minimize additional interactions with Jack. For example, I found that employees often had ideas on ways to improve parts processing. These suggestions may not only have improved the speed by which parts were made, but also improve the quality of parts. The quality manager was an advocate of seeking suggestions from machinists because he felt that they were the ones who knew the process of production best. He also felt that it provided machinists a sense of control over their work. However, any changes to production protocol had to be approved by Jack prior to implementation. It seemed that because of Jack’s demeanor, and the assertion of his power through undercutting comments and disappointing facial and body language expressions he would make to workers, employees infrequently made improvement suggestions.

Perhaps more critically, machinists were reluctant to assist others in their work if Jack did not directly assign the work to them. Although many of the machinists were

friendly with each other, ate lunch together, chatted outside in the morning together, and went on smoke breaks together (particularly those who worked at the factory for a decade or longer, which constituted more than half the workers), they could not rely on each other for work-related assistance. They maintained distance from each other on the work floor because they sought to minimize the possibility of being scolded by Jack. Thus, machinists' accomplishment of AeroGears' mission to produce a precise part was organized around the performance of sticking to their task to avoid any negative feedback or chiding from Jack. During routine business operations, machinists only focused on completing the specific job assigned to them.

This meant that floor workers avoided assisting other machinists if they had a question about their work. When one machinist would ask another a question about completing a particular job, I would often hear the retort: "Ask Jack." But more often, employees would try to accomplish their work without pursuing help from other employees or from Jack. Instead, they would stay focused on the specific cutting or shaping task they were responsible for completing. This was true for situations in which employees believed there were ways they could expedite a job, as well as times in which employees worked on a set of piece that had some sort of imperfection. In the case of imperfections, rather than calling attention to the issue and letting Jack know about it, machinists often continued working the part according to their particular task. Only after these parts were checked by Jack or by a quality assurance assistant, would it be discovered that dozens of pieces needed reworking. And when an investigation was made to determine why rework was needed (a requirement according to AS9100 operating procedures), machinists who accepted imprecise parts from a previous worker would

often say that they did not notice the issue, or that it was simply not their responsibility to check the measurement of a part from the previous worker.

Issues that came up when Jack was not at work and on vacation demonstrated the inefficiencies of the routine business operations at AeroGears. Since employees stuck to their own tasks, did not check each other's work, and because multiple individuals machined each piece but refused to cooperate with one another, errors were infrequently recognized while a job is in process. Only when Jack, Alex, or the Assistant Quality Manager checked the work were issues discovered. This was especially problematic when a single job required production of several hundred parts. These jobs were broken up into a dozen or more smaller jobs, spread around the shop floor and worked on simultaneously. Keeping track of how many pieces were processed is the responsibility of each machinist—each had his own stamp with a designated number, which he used to mark a completed task on the Job Report (the physical document that is circulated with each box of parts). Each machinist is required to leave a stamp on the Report and write the number of pieces he processed.

When Jack was not in town, Alex assumed responsibility for job floor progress of parts. When he checked into one particular job, he quickly noticed that the number of parts completed did not correctly add up. As was the case in the past, multiple people had counted their share of the processed parts incorrectly and passed their work onto the next person. Machinists did not double check other machinists' counts, and likely had a subsequent miscount themselves. To get to the "root cause" of the issue (the term used to trace back any improper machined part, including miscounts), Alex had to retrace the production of each batch—and there were hundreds of parts split among more than a

dozen batches. Alex told me that “It’s not done intentionally. And it’s not that these guys are stupid....They don’t care about me. And frankly, I couldn’t give a fuck what they do. I’m sure I annoy them. But this is what I need to do when he’s [Jack’s] away.” In this situation, Alex suggested that the machinists made accidental errors. He was clear that mistakes were made unintentionally and not out of some sort of retribution or to purposively stall the production process. But he did not suggest that this is something they should have caught on their own—even though from my perspective, if a machinist double-checked the number of parts he processed, he would recognize that there were miscounts, and correct the mistake immediately. Nonetheless, Alex reinforced the routine business performance as “stick to your task” by suggesting that he “couldn’t give a fuck what they do,” and it is simply his responsibility to discover the issue’s root cause, but not to interfere with the general processes.

The consequence of machinists’ singular focus on completing the explicit task assigned to them resulted in high rates of inefficiency—both in time as well as in material. The result of this inefficiency led to an ongoing backlog of partially-completed job orders, numerous hours reworking parts that sometimes had to be expedited because of delays, and a reinforcement among factory workers that the business performance was to stick to your own task.

“We’re Behind”....”Ship Red”

I quickly noticed that the issues that employees bring up to Jack, which Jack positions as “complaints,” are in fact real concerns employees have about successfully completing their work close to the scheduled delivery dates they promised to clients. The

following comment relayed by Jack that I recorded in my field notes typified the frustration that machinists experienced about backlogged items that result from inefficient operations and lack of joint problem solving:

"Jon [a machinist] said this to me three times in the last two days... 'I'm just trying to keep up.'" And Jack said that he told Jon: "If you're behind, just do your job. If you're behind, that's fine because we're behind."

This reassurance from Jack implies that the delay in production is not an issue that the workers need to be concerned with. However, Jack has also criticized employees for production delays, telling them that they are not working efficiently enough or that there are too many reworks that they have had to handle.

There were many occasions that I witnessed Jack raising his voice at employees who were standing around for a few minutes not working—demanding to know why they were not busy on their machines. They would usually explain that they were waiting on a piece from a prior machine to be completed. But I could hear Jack telling them how behind production was and then give them pieces from another job to cut while they waited. Of course this resulted in additional stalls in moving the most important parts forward, as machinists would continue working on the new parts handed to them until Jack instructed them to switch their work to the initial piece they were waiting on.

It is clear that there are opportunities for Jack to negotiate a change in the business performance and influence the way that workers relate to each other—in instances where employees may be waiting on pieces to finish, Jack could encourage and give authority to machinists to see how they could help those already burdened with work, or take action to determine what projects they should begin to machine. Instead, Jack reinforced the routine business performance of sticking to your task by assigning a

new task for that worker. In addition, Jack continues to retain control over the flow of work by giving waiting workers a new specific job to handle.

Two recent management-level hires, Keith (an Assistant Project Manager who began working during my last four months of data collection), and Fred (the Assistant Floor Manager who was hired a year after I first began working), both had many years of factory experience at large organizations. They freely told me about the many gripes they had related to Jack and Leo's poor planning, but the most significant issue they spoke about was the amount of money thrown away on rush deliveries, known as UPS Red. Red is the name UPS gave to its overnight shipping option. When something is shipped "Red," as it was called at AeroGears, the cost for shipping rises exponentially. And during the last few months I was conducting my fieldwork, I heard the question, "should we plan to ship it red?" asked often.

AeroGears would send out parts UPS Red to its final purchasing clients, but also to other companies that heat or chemically treat certain AeroGears' parts. AeroGears would also pay to have those treated parts sent back to AeroGears shipped Red for final working, which would then be sent Red once again to the purchaser. One week Keith came to me and showed me the calculations he made to determine how much additional cost AeroGears spent on Red shipments. He calculated \$3000 extra was spent in just a five-day period. He said exasperated: "How can we recoup these losses? There's no way." He went on to say that: "I would rather figure out a way to save the company money so I can get a raise." Despite suggestions that Keith, Fred, and I made during our time at AeroGears (including the numerous hours spent on the "Word Document to NoWhere," discussed in Chapter 7), we were unable to implement any efficiency changes

that could both save time and money while we worked towards the organization's primary goal.

Violations and Resistance at the Top

Compared to Rolling Hills, where violations occurred between the firm owner and workers (or volunteers), it appears that workers who resisted the routine business operations at AeroGears were either scolded enough into desisting from future resistance, or they left the company (I assume they preferred to seek employment elsewhere rather than contend with ongoing resistance efforts). Several employees told me that they “did not feel appreciated” at AeroGears, but could not find other steady employment in the immediate area. Thus, they were resolved to “be lifers” at AeroGears, as one employee put it.

Resistance at AeroGears occurred among top managers primarily over issues of authority over processing the flow of jobs on the shop floor. Jack, Leo, and Alex all complained that, “everyone's doing the same job”—although “everyone” referred to the overlap of work between Jack and Leo. Each manager talked extensively about the need for each person to focus on their specific work, adding to a culture where all employees, including managers, “stick to their task.” At the level of management, sticking to one's task is needed to avoid duplicating someone's work or sidestepping others' decisions. Violations of the performance of the business operations have led to heated conflicts.

What this has meant is that sometimes Jack will receive a job from Alex and then release it to the floor to begin processing. The next day, Leo may get a call from a customer needing his job rushed. So, Leo will go down the floor and tell a worker to

complete this rushed job first, without conferring with Jack. When Jack questions the employee later in the day about why he has not yet finished machining the parts he requested, he tells Jack he received another job from Leo. Aside from the delays in production that result from such interference, interpersonal conflicts arise between Jack and Leo that often escalate into brief but angry arguments.

When I asked workers why they would not check with Jack if they received different instructions from Leo, they said, “Leo is the owner, so what he says goes.” Coupled with the fact of Leo’s top position in the organization’s hierarchy, this machinist makes a logical argument given the routine business performance—once a task is given you complete it unquestioned. However, Jack clearly believes that he controls work on the factory floor and that Leo was interfering with his domain. I never heard Jack ask Leo to discuss with him if a part could be moved up in production. Instead, Jack told Leo to not interfere. He felt Leo violated the expectations of the routine business operations, and in his anger, Jack made it clear that Leo should stick to his own task.

The Magical Yellow Pad – Rejecting Efficiency to Retain Power

A primary example of the way Jack demonstrates his authority as well as resistance to change in the organization is through the maintenance of his yellow pad to coordinate shop floor job schedules. As previously noted, all parts at the shop are worked by several machines—a lathe, a milling machine, etc., and are then finished by the deburring department. Although some machines are highly specialized and are the only machines capable of performing certain cuts, there is typically more than one machine that can perform the same function. Furthermore, although commercial pieces can be

made on any machine appropriate to make the needed cuts, only certain machines are approved to cut aerospace pieces. The aerospace suppliers require these approvals to control potential variation on final piece construction. For example, if an aerospace piece must be cut on a Mori machine, but it is currently being used to cut another piece, then those aerospace pieces-in-process sit boxed, next to the machine, waiting to be processed. The wait times can be from an hour or two to several days. The backups on one machine often snowball into the delayed production of multiple pieces, contributing to ongoing production delays. Tracking several dozen jobs working through the factory at any given time, coordinating which machines are needed for each job, and accounting for the expertise that different machinists have (and when they may be on vacation, or call in sick, etc.) is a daunting task.

Computer programs to facilitate this scheduling coordination have been around for more than two decades. Managers can input a high level of specificity into these software programs, including the machines on hand, the number of working hours and skill levels of employees, the estimated length of time to complete particular cuts, slack time of individual employees, etc. Once this information is inputted, the software program makes suggestions on which pieces should be processed on each machine and how those pieces should be rotated between machines. It accounts for the greatest efficiency of employee skill and machine use. As I previously noted, one of the reasons Leo was interested in bringing me in to work at AeroGears was to have me implement the JobBoss software, a popular computer program that performs this sort of scheduling.

Despite the fact that AeroGears has owned the JobBoss software for nearly a decade, Jack regulated the processing of pieces on a yellow legal pad. Everyone in the

factory was familiar with this pad. Keith, referred to it as “that magical yellow pad”—teasing about the fact that a static rigid writing pad does not provide the necessary fluidity needed to efficiently regulate the flow of worked pieces on the factory floor. Jack would sometimes carry this pad around the factory while he checked on the status of worked jobs. When changes were made on the pad (for example, if a piece was initially to be cut on one machine, but moved to another), Jack would white out the information he jotted down and write his update over it. It was this yellow legal pad, painted throughout with multiple layers of white-out, that was used to plan the flow of hundreds of thousands of dollars of parts that travelled around the factory floor each day. Jack was the only one who updated job progress information, and if anyone had a question about the status of a job, they had to ask Jack, who would check the updated information on the “magic yellow pad.”

Conclusion on Routine Business Performance at AeroGears

The routine business operations at AeroGears was generated and reinforced by Jack, a floor manager who desired to keep his sphere of power, and by his superior and the factory owner, Leo, who seemed to tacitly approve of Jack’s practices. By keeping information about the progress of parts moving through the factory under his exclusive domain, Jack was not only able to maintain control over production, but also held the greatest power to resist updated factory processes and implementation of more efficient organizational operations, including basic software packages used in all modern factories. It also meant that individual employees were relatively unaware of when any particular job was expected to be complete, and therefore, did not have the knowledge to assist machinists that might have been behind in their work. Thus, Jack’s management of his

yellow pad helped to perpetuate the cultural performance of “sticking to your task” during routine business operations.

Despite disgruntled sentiments by long-term employees, these employees helped to perpetuate AeroGears’ routine business operations by succumbing to Jack’s rule and acting on their gratitude and reverence for Leo’s business acumen and ability to keep all his employees during the recession. Although recent hires often left AeroGears within a few years, several stayed at AeroGears because they saw a stable flow of business. At other factories in the area, business was sparse and long-term employment was less guaranteed.

Moreover, Jack’s rule by discipline and fear led employees to avoid assisting each other. Even though many of the machinists considered each other friends, they preferred to stick to their own work rather than deal with a potential reprimand from Jack for getting involved with a job that was not given as a direct order to them. As a result of the culture that had developed on the shop floor, employees rarely demonstrated resistance to Jack. Instead, it appears that employees would rather look for other work than contend with “Jack’s attitude” as one employee explained it.

Alex told me numerous times about his frustration with Jack and “the general culture of ‘No’” as he once explained to me in regards to making organizational changes. Alex was endlessly frustrated with trying to create more processes to both streamline the organization and enable the perseverance of the firm if, “Jack or Leo suddenly died” (as was Alex’s typical extreme example of why processes and procedures were so critical). Instead, Leo and Jack preferred that machinists stick to their specific jobs, and they also preferred that managers stick to their defined roles as well. By perpetuating this routine

business operation, the organization was highly inefficient but Jack was able to maintain his power position in the firm.

ElderCare

Primary Goal: *Compassionate Care*

Performance: *Collaborative Efforts*

Critical Components:

1. *Alice, the company owner, and Jenn, the administrative assistant, worked very closely together, jointly making routine as well as critical organizational decisions.*

2. *Alice sought to hire office staff employees that complemented each other's skills and contributed to a collaborative work environment.*

3. *Because of the emotional nature of elder care work, as well as the ongoing frustrations staff employees experienced with home health aides, staff workers' conversations frequently revolve around exasperated humorous stories. These stories serve to reduce employee stress, but also to provide opportunities for employees to share information about clients and field staff.*

4. *Although collaboration in the office was an integral part of the relationship between employees, collaborative work was only appropriate when knowledge, either skill- or experiential-based, helped further the organization's goals. An employee that sought collaboration for more menial tasks such as technical assistance was shunned as violating the expectations for collaboration.*

5. *Jenn demonstrated resistance to the collaborative culture, by refusing to assume additional office responsibilities and by voicing dissatisfaction about her salary. When she felt her work responsibilities and collaborative efforts were not appreciated in the form of salary compensation, she violated her collaborative relationship with Alice.*

Leadership – A Balance of Perspectives

Alice told me that one of the primary reasons she wanted to operate her own business was so that she could create a business culture that she wanted to be around each day. She had worked in corporate cultures for the past two decades, and commented on the sometimes-adversarial nature of those environments. She said that she wanted to create a friendly atmosphere where people “really liked each other” and complemented each other's work. She also said she did not want someone to make a decision and, “you just had to follow the plan and zooodooom” stretching one arm out, mimicking a plane

taking off. She values freedom and creativity in the business process as well as seeking opinions from others to effectively develop and roll out strategy. Together with Jenn, two part-time nurses (who each came to the office a few hours each week to file paperwork after visiting clients), a part-time consultant (who came in one afternoon a week), a sales agent, summer help from Jenn's daughter and Alice's nephew, and my own assistance, Alice proudly and affectionately referred to the office staff as "a rag tag team." After six months of work, the office staff also included a full-time nurse and a part-time secretary/scheduler. The organization's home health aides, whom I also refer to as field workers, infrequently came to the office, aside from routine quality testing and meetings.

What was critical to the culture at ElderCare, especially during the first year that I collected data, was the relationship between Jenn and Alice and how they led the organization together. Although Alice was the owner and Jenn was the administrative assistant, they worked very closely together on many parts of the organization, often making joint decisions. They were the central players who built the initial structures of the business and who developed emotionally together as they both learned about the health care industry. Alice seemed to especially appreciate Jenn's commitment to ElderCare and spoke about the importance of Jenn's decision-making processes:

Alice: "Most [franchisees] have high turnover in [the administrative assistant] position...but I think [Jenn's stayed because] Jenn and I complement each other very well. Jenn's more black and white, and I'm more gray. Right Jenn?"

Jenn: "Oh, yes" Jenn replied. Very gray. Gray, gray, gray."

Alice: "I go through all the possibilities. We could do that, or this, and if we decide to do X what happens with Y....It can get annoying."

Jenn: nodded.

Numerous times I heard Alice talk through decisions with Jenn, and the potential scenarios that might result if certain decisions were made. During these talks, Jenn's face

would often scrunch up as she tried to sort through the numerous details and influencing factors that Alice was presenting. At some point, Jenn usually interrupted Alice and repeated back to her a few critical issues that Jenn believed were most significant to make the decisions. Then Jenn would give her opinion on the issue. Alice sometimes responded, making suggestions about other possible outcomes, and Jenn often shook her head or reiterated points Alice already made until Alice agreed. Afterwards, Jenn would jokingly say, “Done” or “That was easy” or “That was a no-brainer” and she got back to her own work.

Alice would often ask for Jenn’s opinion in regards to placing specific aides with specific clients, hiring of new employees, or reprimanding aides. When Alice began to hire additional staff workers, it was evident that she sought to hire people that complemented each other, and as Alice said, “balance me out.” In fact, Alice once had each of us complete a shortened version of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to determine what type of personality profiles we had to see how balanced the office was.

In a discussion Alice and I had about her responsibilities in the organization, she said, “Everyone knows what to do, which is everything.” And laughed. She said that this is because “our office is small” and has few resources. However, as it occurred in AeroGears, the top leaders’ decisions sometimes overlapped, and occasionally Jenn and Alice stepped on each other’s toes. For example, there was disagreement between Jenn and Alice about which aide should be sent to a clients’ home. When Alice’s nephew Sam, asked Jenn whom they were planning on sending, Jenn frustratingly responded, “Ask Alice,” because Alice wanted to send an aide that Jenn believed was not a good match for the client. In turn, Alice responded, “It’s up to Jenn.” In response, Sam said: “Are you

two going to ever figure out who's responsible for what?" In their own annoyance, neither Alice nor Jenn responded to Sam's comment.

When I asked Jenn what her favorite part of the job was, she said: "Going home at night." Then laughed. "No, my favorite part is when the elderlies [a comical term Jenn often used] call me and need help and I can help them. Like when they're like, 'Oh my god, my husband needs help and I'm just as old as he is!' And I get an aide they love. That makes me feel warm and fuzzy inside." She said smiling. But then Jenn went on to say that the job is certainly a mixed bag. "And then I'll get a phone call from someone else who yells at me and says bad things about me." Usually these calls are from frustrated clients who feel that the aides they sent were performing unsatisfactorily—although most of these calls were from clients' adult children that had unreasonable expectations of what an aide's responsibilities were. In contrast to Jenn, Alice told me that her favorite part of the job was "going out there and meeting the people I'm helping." Jenn told me that she preferred to help them "from afar" because going into a client's home or seeing their condition in person "depresses me." One time Alice asked Jenn if she could go to a client's house to do an assessment:

Jenn: "I don't want to. I don't like to"

Alice: "You went once. Why don't you like it?"

Jenn: Shakes her head and doesn't say anything.

Alice: "This is the only nice thing about this business!"

Jenn: "What is?"

Alice: "Sitting in someone's living room and talking to them. Everything else isn't worth it."

Despite these different perspectives, both Jenn and Alice emphasized to me that helping others is the reason why they continue working in health care. This explanation is the same one given by home health aides as well as newer office staff I interviewed after

I stopped working at ElderCare. Alice and Jenn clearly demonstrated their compassion for clients: they spent long periods of time determining the best matches between clients and aides, spending valuable “work time” chatting on the phone with some elderlies to simply “lift their spirits” and “keep them company” as Jenn put it, and the anger they expressed when clients’ families neglect to provide basic care and compassion for their own ailing parents. The initial collaborative nature of the routine business performance established by Alice and Jenn, as well as Alice’s very deliberate intention to hire workers with complementary skills and personalities, helped to create a fun and caring firm environment.

Accomplishing Daily Work – Humor for Sanity

The ElderCare office was often filled with exasperation and humor, primarily stemming from the bewilderment of Alice and Jenn on the ways their home health aides, clients, and children of clients acted. Alice often commented that the office is run “on a wing and a prayer.”

In one instance, an aide who was providing additional support at a daycare center for the elderly fell asleep in a chair while at work. (We later found out that she was on break when she fell asleep, although it is obvious that an employee should not be seen sleeping in the workplace.) Alice received calls from several employees at the daycare center letting her know about the delinquency of this aide. Throughout this same day, Alice had trouble getting some aides to complete necessary training, and had difficulty finding an aide to fill a last minute weekend job. Finally in the afternoon, Alice said:

“It is beyond me that at 3pm today, this one falls asleep, this one can’t come in to do her training...and this one says, ‘Ohhh, I just don’t want to’...we just don’t have enough aides or enough cases to play with this shit.”

The woman who fell asleep texted Alice a few minutes after Alice made the above comment. Alice got up from her desk and walked over to me to show me the text, which read: “The reason I think that I knotted out was that... they were giving out huge hot dogs and sodas for lunch...and fatty foods makes you tired...and I usually eats two pieces of fruit for lunch or a healthy sandwich...” Alice said to me, “Who would ever think of texting your boss like that? You know, my dad warned me about this business. He said, ‘Alice, you will not be able to relate to these people.’ And I said, in my infinite wisdom, ‘I’ve worked with warehouse people, I can relate.’ You know what, I can’t.” She chuckled and shook her head.

Here, Alice was suggesting that she did not have empathy for her home health aide workers and their shortcomings. However, Alice came to understand how to work with her aides. She was generous to those who were able to fulfill their basic job responsibilities, even though she felt initially they should not be rewarded for simply performing their jobs. For those who were non-compliant, she typically chalked up their inability to support the organization to their social situations, rather than getting upset with their delinquencies. Nonetheless, this never prevented her from an exasperated laugh or joke about what an aide did (or did not do). On any given day, when a preponderance of issues arose, Alice would refer to ElderCare as “An Island of Misfit Toys,” referencing the island from *Rudolf the Red-Noised Reindeer* where defective and unwanted toys are sent. Alice seemed to revel a bit in her ability to manager her misfits to accomplish productive work.

The joking and sometimes sarcastic remarks Alice and Jenn made about their employees and their clients served three purposes: to manage the stress of operating the firm, to manage their emotions related to elderly clients, and for Jenn and Alice to share information about their employees and clients. On this last point, through informal, humorous conversations, they were able to voice their concerns about the ability of some aides to accomplish their work and update each other about the health status of clients.

The sharing of information through joke telling was particularly important in the daily collaborative work required to schedule home health aides. Even though such work was initially Jenn's responsibility, and later the primary role of a part-time worker who was hired solely to handle scheduling, all employees collaborated on scheduling. It did not seem that anyone in the office found it to be frustrating or annoying to participate in the scheduling process—although as noted previously, sometimes Jenn and Alice would disagree about which aide to schedule with certain clients, occasionally creating conflict. Typically, this collaborative process was something that office staff seemed to enjoy because of specific knowledge each had about certain aides (e.g. whose personality was most accommodating to a last minute weekend placement) or about certain clients (e.g. which client's malaise and depression was getting too difficult to handle as a stay-at-home case). Because most of the office work related to billing and reimbursements, the work of matching clients with aides was a constant office activity.

Such collaborative work was not welcome in all areas of accomplishing routine daily work. For example, a nurse who was hired full-time (who was eventually let go after her three month probation period), constantly had technology-related issues—she couldn't get the fax machine to work, and then the scanner seemed to be temperamental,

and she was not sure how to even properly log into her computer. As with scheduling, it seemed that this nurse believed it was acceptable at ElderCare to call out questions and seek help from those in the office. But an employee who required technical help, especially continuous technical help, was seen as someone who could not master basic work. Helping an employee gain computer competency was not something that provided fulfillment for other employees, nor something that they felt was contributing to the organization in a meaningful way. Instead, these attempts at collaboration were seen as annoyances and incompetency. Thus, while collaboration organized the performance of the routine business operations, collaborative efforts were only appreciated when employees felt that they were offering something critical to the organization's operations as well as using their own unique information to help provide compassionate care for their clients.

African Time and Other Employees' Shortcomings

In interviews I had with aides, they all said that their primary motivation for working as a home health aide was the satisfaction they got from caring for the elderly. They often felt that they were uniquely skilled to care for individuals and all felt a great sense of pride in performing their jobs. However, most of the aides, whether they worked in their positions for more than a decade or recently completed their licenses, wound up as home health aides because of the ease, low-cost and low time commitment to securing a home health license (typically a few hundred dollars and just a few days of training). Many stayed in the field because, as most interviewed aides said, it's easy to find work and they could have a flexible schedule. For example, some aides only wanted to work in

the mornings so they could be home in the afternoons for their children. Others preferred working weekends because they held other jobs during the week.

Despite the desire many of the aides had to secure as many clients as available, and their the intrinsic motivation they claimed to have for caring for the sick and elderly, it was difficult to get aides to clients' homes and aides were often unreliable. First, a number of the aides did not own their own vehicles, and because the counties in ElderCare's franchise territory were suburban, public transportation could take employees typically within a few miles of clients' homes, but not within walking distance. Many of those who owned vehicles seemed to routinely have car trouble. Second, home health aides would sometimes commit to a new client, and then back out a day or two before starting their new job. Typically, this would occur because the aide secured a longer-term, perhaps higher paying opportunity with another agency's client. Such regular cancellations resulted in a lot of last minute scrambling for fill-ins and extra time committed to scheduling.

Although Alice attributed these issues to the home health care industry, Alice and Jenn both suggested that there are some cultural differences between the U.S. and those cultures that her home health aides come from, causing additional difficulties with reliability of aides. One example she gave was timeliness. She said that many of her employees who emigrated from Ghana "never get to work on time." She said that when they leave the house in the morning, what is of tantamount importance is the community. So if they come across someone in their village who has a flat tire or an elderly person that needs something from the store, they'll take care of this first before going to work.

She went on to joke that when they are catching a flight, they delay the flight until everyone's there:

"...you know, call everyone's name out or something," she said smiling. "Obviously this doesn't work here. If you're supposed to be somewhere on time, you need to be there on time. And when you get angry at someone for being late, they don't get it. It's like, 'What did I do wrong?' because they have that different mindset and culture. You can't wipe away all those years of living in that particular culture. It takes a long time to get them to understand your expectations."

Alice referred to this perpetual lateness among her staff as "African time." She said that it's not that they are lazy, "quite the opposite. They're probably doing something at home for their own children or their own elderly parent or a neighbor, and they think it's okay if they're a little late. That's how it probably worked in whatever city or village they used to live in. But they really need to learn American time." Even some of the most loyal and best aides would sometimes show up late to their clients' homes. Because elderly clients rarely called the office to complain about anything, Alice typically does not know when an aide shows up late unless she calls the clients' home.

Dirty Old Men

Although there were a number of different issues that came up with clients that made appropriate matches sometimes difficult, a regular concern that in the office were clients who were "horn dogs," a term used by one of the nurses. Sometimes the office got complaints from aides that an elderly client tried to touch them inappropriately or asked them to go to bed with them. Often these situations developed when an aide was bathing a male client, or when she was changing a client's clothing prior to bed. These stories were told repeatedly when aides would come into the office to take care of paperwork, complete routine training, or speak about their concerns during annual meetings. Jenn

often referred to these individuals as “dirty old men.” Rather than taking offense, most aides laughed about these advances or flirtations. The aides knew that these comments would not go any further because the aides were usually much stronger than the frail men they took care of. (Although there were two or three physically strong clients who made threats to the aides because of dementia-related issues, these threats resulted in ElderCare removing their employees from the clients’ homes and recommending that the client be placed in a full-time home facility.)

Even though advances were not typically an issue for aides, there were several aides who were more sensitive to these comments and felt uncomfortable working with clients who made such comments. Those aides who expressed discomfort were removed from the homes of these clients. One particular aide who had this issue was never asked to work with any clients who Alice or the head nurse felt could get “a little too flirty,” as the nurse put it.

Violations and Deserving More

Despite Jenn’s claims of intrinsic motivation and the satisfaction derived from helping clients, she harbored some resentment towards Alice regarding the amount of work she handled. More specifically, she felt that given her responsibilities, she should be paid more. Jenn mentioned that she had not received a raise since she started working. On numerous occasions at the end of the work day, she would tell me that she was bringing work home. And she would often make explicit comments, like: “I don’t get paid enough to handle all this.” However, Jenn was familiar with nearly all of ElderCare’s expenses. She was responsible for payroll and was largely responsible for accounts receivable. She

was also aware that ElderCare did not yet make a profit every month. Nevertheless, she felt that she deserved more pay for, “all the anxiety this job gives me.”

When she was driving aides to clients’ homes during the first winter I was there, Jenn was given an additional weekly bump in pay to cover gas and other vehicle expenses. However, once she discontinued driving aides, she did not stop paying herself that additional weekly amount. She told me in confidence that she felt that she deserved it and that she would continue paying herself until Alice said otherwise. The consultant who worked at ElderCare told me that Alice complained to him that Jenn was continuing to give herself a boost in pay each week. She told him, “I didn’t tell her she could do that.” But Alice also did not say anything to Jenn about this extra pay. Although the consultant suggested that Alice speak with Jenn about this, Alice said that she did not want to confront her about it and “stir things up.” This situation echoes that of Leo and Jack—where both owners are willing to sacrifice profits for relational maintenance but choosing to rationalize and ignore evident concerns that have with important employees.

Despite the working relationships and camaraderie between Jenn and Alice in the office, Jenn’s salary was a point of persistent resentment. Jenn knew that her actions were a violation of the normal way to receive a raise, confiding in me about her guilt. Nevertheless, she felt deserving of an increase in salary. And it may be that Alice also felt that she deserved more money, even if she did not have the resources to pay her. Alice chose to tacitly approve of the raise, rather than confront Jenn and perhaps cause a kink in the collaborative culture created at ElderCare.

Conclusion on Routine Business Performance at ElderCare

Alice perpetuated the culture of collaboration as she continued hiring new office staff. Alice sought to build a culture that “she wanted to come to every day,” and create a group of people with complimentary skills and personalities. Staff employees primarily worked together on matching home health aides with clients, one of the most critical tasks of the organization. Employees shared their ongoing knowledge about clients and home health aides by trading stories, typically stories of frustration. Nonetheless, these stories were often told in humorous ways because of the ongoing disbelief in the unprofessionalism they experienced with their field workers—including the many perpetually late employees who showed up to work on their own “African time.” Stories were also told about the clients, whether it was “dirty old men” who tried making passes at aides, or clients’ families who took little responsibility for assisting their elderly parents. Humorous stories and expressions of frustrated served to both reduce the stress of office staff and provide updates about aides and clients that were referenced when matches were made.

Humor also served as way for ElderCare staff to express their personal feelings about the health care industry and their sentiments about aging and sickness. For Alice, joking also provided a source of comparison between her prior career in corporate management, and her current small business work. Despite all the humor around the “stupidity of this business” as she labeled it, she repeatedly emphasized to me that she enjoyed helping her clients and she liked the office environment she created.

Although a collaborative culture provided the basis for high levels of conversation among employees, it was clear that collaboration was appropriate at ElderCare when staff

employees had unique knowledge to share with one another about an aide or a client that helped support the matching process. When an employee sought collaborative help with more menial tasks, I found that staff workers felt this person violated the expectations of the collaborative culture and did not integrate well with the group. Another example of violation occurred more subversively when Jenn believed her collaborative efforts were not being rewarded monetarily. Rather than asking Alice for a raise, she continued paying herself an extra weekly, unauthorized payment. However, Alice never confronted Jenn about this. I believe that Alice thought Jenn deserved the additional, small amount, and perhaps as part of the collaborative exchange, it was never mentioned between them.

Thorny Rose

Primary Goal: *Beautiful arrangements*

Performance: *Whatever needs to get done*

Critical components:

1. *Although Julian, the oldest sibling and most experienced florist in this third generation family business, has the greatest amount of responsibility in the organization and is considered the de facto leader, he is unable to direct his siblings' work.*

2. *Nicholas, the youngest sibling assumes a large amount of responsibility, but his abrasive management style spills over into conflict with his own siblings about how to run the Thorny Rose.*

3. *Despite differences in management style and responsibility, all siblings learn the family trade through experiential trial and error, followed by critiques from the family.*

4. *More than simply designing floral arrangements, family members are expected to be responsible for handling all aspects of the businesses so they can learn to do whatever needs to get done. This ongoing training leads family members to have high expectations for each other.*

5. *However, because nobody in the organization has the power to lead during routine business operations, each sibling takes on responsibilities as he or she chooses—and each member believes that their work is the most critical performance of the primary organization's goal. Because of these different interpretations, each family member feels his or her siblings are committing daily violations, resulting in high levels of organizational conflict.*

Dual Leadership – A “Father” With No Authority and a Ruler with an Iron Fist

A new customer who might listen to the conversation among the family members at the Thorny Rose would not know who was in charge. There was no deference to a single authority figure, nobody directed the flutter of activities, and if one sibling had a question, that person would often ask the closest person to them rather than seeking someone who might ultimately be responsible for certain organizational knowledge. There was no clear leader at Thorny Rose when seen from the perspective of a client. However, the person who assumed the greatest responsibility, Julian, was considered the organization’s leader by his siblings. Julian is responsible for the majority of the store’s nearly daily flower purchases, all legal aspects related to the business (e.g. business licenses, insurance, taxes, etc.), many of the wholesale clients, and he makes many of the most elaborate floral pieces at the store (which are typically funeral pieces made to resemble prized possessions owned by the deceased or representations of that individuals’ passions, e.g. a five-foot-long sailboat or a four-foot tall can of beer).

On more than one occasion a client would call inquiring about a late delivery or lack of follow-up phone call after a price inquiry. Julian would say that, “they [my family] dropped the ball again...[they] get lazy,” and don’t handle things when they should. “They think it just magically gets done.” I often heard him say that, “my family’s not helping out like they should.” At the start of the second summer of my data collection, Julian mentioned that he needed to organize his tax information from the previous year, since the accountant kept calling to try and set up an appointment. He did not have the time to organize his tax information, but his extension was ending soon. At the time that Julian set aside to finally complete his tax work, both Tyler and Nicholas

wanted to have a few days off. Julian actually texted me to see if I could work an extra day, that he would pay me extra. I wasn't able to assist and he told me that he wound up bringing in a seasonal worker to help. "My family's just not reliable sometimes."

Julian's position as the de facto organizational leader and go-to person for most administrative work was made abundantly clear to me when Julian demonstrated, for my benefit and his amusement, what the other siblings say when someone calls the store and Julian is not around. Julian said that his siblings do not attempt to handle any non-customer store concerns when he is not there. Instead, his siblings defer all information to the next day that he's in. In this test, Julian asked Tyler what she said when someone calls with a billing question:

Tyler: "The office manager is not in today, can you call back tomorrow."

Julian: [Laughs] "And how about when there's an accounts payable questions?"

Tyler: "The person responsible for accounts payable is not in today...."

Julian: [Laughs] "Etc. etc. "

Tyler: "Well, I don't know where any of that stuff is. Nobody ever showed me, so I wouldn't know how to take care of it."

Julian: [Smiled] "Really? I never showed you where the file cabinet is?"

Tyler: "I'm tired, I'm going home ." And she climbed the steps to go to her apartment upstairs from the shop.

Julian told me that he has shown Tyler where he keeps some of this paperwork, and he has asked Tyler in the past to handle some of it, "but she doesn't. Nobody does." And so Julian seems to get the manager title for every department at Thorny Rose.

It seemed that the siblings fail to recognize the importance of completing the administrative work in the shop. In fact, siblings often criticize Julian when he is paying bills, calling the store's accountant and lawyer, and handling other paperwork for the store. Nearly every time Julian spends concentrated time (i.e. more than 10 minutes) at his desk completing this critical work, he is chastised as being lazy for "just sitting

around,” as the siblings often say. Julian told me that he was trying to complete paying bills (which were already late), and then “Tyler had the nerve to ask me if I ‘was going to get off my ass and help make [floral] arrangements?!’” So Julian told me that he told her “If I don’t take care of this, who’s going to pay the electric bill? When there’s no lights in the morning, what’s going to happen then? If I don’t order the flowers, then when there’s nothing in the fridge to make arrangements, what are you going to say?” She had no response.

Despite the unwarranted criticism that Julian gets for taking care of the store’s critical paperwork, as well as the lack of assistance to aid him in completing administrative work of the shop, Julian’s siblings recognize that he takes on a tremendous amount of responsibility at the florist. In fact, Nicholas said that, “Julian probably does 80 percent of what’s needed here,” and his younger sister Lilia has said Julian was “a saint” to “put up with us,” while taking care of all his work at the shop, and the youngest sister, Tyler said “I don’t know what would happen if Julian wasn’t here.” Despite this recognition and even gratitude concerning Julian’s commitment to the florist and to his siblings, these are only sentiments. The siblings do not take direction from Julian.

There is no established hierarchy of authority in the organization. Julian said that when their father ran the shop, he operated like a dictator and everyone listened to him. Julian has said, “I’m the father, but no one listens to me.” Julian said that he tries to take command of the florist, but “because of my own abandonment issues, I give in to all my siblings.” He’s referencing the fact that when Julian was in high school and his siblings were very young, his father left the family for another woman. Despite receiving a scholarship to go to college, Julian instead went to work full time at a department store,

and part time at his father's florist in order to help support his mother and his siblings. Despite the occasional discussions of how their father's decision to "abandon his family," as Julian put it, continues to influence the family and the dynamics of the siblings, all the family members still hold their father in high reverence.

Julian has historically served as the family's caretaker. He knows that his deep commitment to serve his family is the Achilles' heel for proper organizational leadership and his own happiness. He believes that he sacrifices his own leisure time and often his personal interests so his siblings can enjoy a more stable work-life balance, reduce their own stresses, and generally do what they would like to do to be happy. Although Julian constantly expressed his frustration with me about his siblings' inability to take on additional work at the store that is "necessary for us to keep our doors open," Julian had the same responsibilities throughout the time I collected data. He insisted that he wants his siblings to do more of the administrative work of the florist, but they do not take on additional responsibility. During the time I collected data, Julian asked his siblings on a weekly basis to handle different billing, tax, and legal inquiries. Sometimes, Julian specifically told a sibling whom to call and what to do—but there was infrequently any follow-up, and the result was that Julian wound up completing the work in the end. When he lamented about not being able to get his siblings to take on the work, Julian told me that his father said that "you should never have family work for you because you can't tell them what to do." Although this comment seemed to serve more as a frustrated complaint rather than advice, since nearly all of the siblings worked for their father, and the siblings' told me that much of their current commitment to the business is to continue to honor and serve their father's and grandfather's commitments to the business.

In addition to Julian, Nicholas can be considered the other organizational leader. He assumes a large amount of management responsibility as well. He considered himself to be the main person responsible for the non-sibling employees, his ability to make elaborate floral arrangements quickly is objectively impressive, and he assumed responsibility for the “garden area” (or outside space) where most of the strenuous physical labor takes places (including the annual creation and tear-down of the Christmas tree displays, the creation of hundreds of palms for Palm Sunday, preparation of hundreds of grave blankets in the winter, replanting of geraniums for wholesale clients, etc.). However, his style of communication with his siblings and with employees was in stark contrast to Julian’s. Unlike Julian, who felt responsible for his siblings’ happiness, protected them from some of the office stresses and work (while holding resentments about their lack of responsibility), but all the while treating his siblings with respect and good-natured humor, Nicholas is “a tyrant” as several siblings have labeled him. Nicholas seems to have believed that people are inherently lazy, justifying his ferocious attitude at work. He micromanaged employees and daily yells at them in anger and frustration. Just like Jack at AeroGears, Nicholas’s voice is the loudest in the store. If there is a conflict among siblings in the store, he is usually a part of the conflict.

Many of the conflicts that Nicholas is a part of stems from his “rule with an iron fist” belief about managing employees. Although his siblings generally believe that it is a good policy to micromanage non-family employees as well, they do not believe that yelling is a proper tactic to motivate or regulate employee activity. For example, one hot summer day, the Kid (the only full-time non-family designer at the florist) and a new part-time employee kept leaving the door open between the store and the greenhouse. As

a result, the cool air from the air conditioner unit was quickly escaping, making the store uncomfortable for customers and also contributing to an early death for some of the flowers in the shop. Both employees were told several times to keep the doors closed.

Towards the end of the day, Nicholas came into the store and yelled:

Nicholas: “Julian, this shit has to change. Now they’re laughing when I tell them they need to keep the door closed. You being nice to everyone leads me to have to yell at everyone. And now nobody’s listening to me. You need to be on the same side and back me up with the things that need to get done.”

Julian: “I do. I tell them what they need to do.”

Nicholas: “No, but you let them get away with it and then you turn around and you’re all nice to them.”

Julian: “Well, I’m not going to yell at them like you do.”

Nicholas: “This isn’t working because then I’m the asshole and nobody listens. So what’s the point.”

Julian: Turned to me and shrugged his shoulders. “Nicholas yells because he likes to yell, not because of me.” [Laughs.]

A Family’s (Learned) Skill for Beautiful Arrangements

All the family members at the Thorny Rose were very proud of the florists’ heritage. I often heard the family tell new customers that the store has been in the family for 83 years. Nicholas was most vocal in translating this family history into an identity about his family’s skill in the floral business and the knowledge that he and his family members have secured from working with their father. Nicholas said to me: “Do you know what our family is really good at? We make shit look beautiful and nobody would know the difference. I can make it beautiful.” When Tyler heard this, she responded, “it’s not shit.” And Nicholas said that she’s right. “It isn’t shit, and that’s my point. To the average person looking at a flower in isolation, they would think that it’s junk.” But Nicholas said that what the family knows how to do is to prune, rearrange, and organize flowers to make them look great. And Tyler responded: “That’s true. We do that well.”

This skill was a source of pride for the entire family, and something that they believed also distinguished them from other florists. The family said that people misinterpret what happens at florists. Nicholas said that people think florists are “filled with women gently arranging flowers in a vase. Do you see us doing that here? We’d never make any money that way.” The family took pride in their ability to competently be a high-volume shop that’s been able to not only produce beautiful arrangements, but to grow and diversify its business.

All family members were compelled to learn which flowers to select for basic floral arrangements for third-party fulfillments, how to negotiate with grieving customers looking for elaborate funeral pieces for a beloved parent, how to read the likelihood of a husband spending more than \$50 on a last-minute birthday arrangement, etc. Although Lilia was primarily responsible for weddings, and Nicholas handled many of the wholesale clients, all siblings were responsible for being able to handle any client. The learning process was sink or swim—a sibling was thrown into a situation with a client without much preparation and then critiqued afterwards. I saw Tyler struggle with helping a wedding party that she did not want to work with because she was unsure of what recommendations to make. And when the clients only made a small order, Tyler debriefed the entire encounter with Lilia, who made recommendations of what she should have done at each step. Tyler was frustrated with having to work with these clients without feeling prepared, as well as being critiqued for her work, even though Lilia told her she had done “good work...and you’ll now know for next time.” Tyler said that she felt, “uncomfortable doing it” and since she handled it, she felt that she “shouldn’t be criticized because [Lilia] could have just done it.” Nevertheless, the lack of formal

processes or directions for working with clients seemed to require the siblings to learn through experience and feedback.

Nicholas explicitly told me that he believed the only way to learn was to “do it yourself,” and that is how I was trained. Because my primary responsibilities were to assist with administrative work and third-party order fulfillment, my interactions with clients were mostly phone-based. So, on my first day of work Nicholas said that I should take orders on the phone. He made a few suggestions on how I should first speak to a customer—asking them what “special occasion” they were ordering flowers for, whom the arrangement was for, how much they would like to spend, if they had color preferences, and if the item was for pick or delivery. In addition to these general instructions, Nicholas provided me with a paper ordering pad and showed me where the credit card processing machine was. Nothing more. Needless to say, I was concerned about making incorrect recommendations to clients, about losing orders for the store or not providing the proper prices to the customers based on what they were looking for. Because of these concerns, when I spoke with customers I would constantly put them on hold and ask Julian or Nicholas about pricing to get a reasonable estimate of what something would cost. However, my primary concern was embarrassing myself in front of the customer and being embarrassed in front of Nicholas and Julian.

After each phone call I took that first day (about four altogether), Nicholas made recommendations about how I could have responded to the customer differently, what recommendations I should have made, what I could have charged them, and what specific phrases I should use (e.g. “We guarantee that she’ll love it,” “our new flower order just arrived today and with proper care, you can keep them looking beautiful for two weeks,”

“can I offer you a balloon with your order to make your gift extra special?”). I was never harshly chastised for not making a higher sale, although I did feel guilty if I was not able to make a sale to a customer. Nevertheless, it seemed that Nicholas and Julian both believed that these losses were a part of the learning processes.

In addition to helping clients, siblings as well as seasonal workers were thrown into tasks of cleaning flowers, making arrangements, ordering flowers, making deliveries, making balloon arrangements, creating fruit baskets, etc. The conscious decision to get all siblings and seasonal employees acquainted with all types of clients as well as types of goods sold created a routine business performance where employees were expected to do anything that needed to get done—except, it seems, necessary business paperwork.

Accomplishing Daily Work – Find Something and Do It

Work distribution at the Thorny Rose is mostly self-designated. All family members are responsible for helping walk-in customers, answering phones, and making all types of floral arrangements. Nicholas primarily handles large wholesale relationships with graveyards, churches, local municipalities, and Christmas tree sales to other florists. Lilia is responsible for the wedding and bridal business; and Julian does everything else needed to keep the store running, including paying bills, taxes, insurance, paying employees and his siblings. Julian is always trying to fight for time to handle the administrative paperwork, although daily order fulfillments, customer inquiries, flower ordering, and other tasks that Julian’s siblings send his way make the task of getting the administrative work done very difficult.

In addition to walk-ins and phone calls from customers placing orders for same-day pick up or delivery, most orders are placed in advance. The daily paper filing system is used to sort each day's orders, making most of the day's work readily knowledgeable and available to all workers. On three long shelves on a wall adjacent to the office, behind the counter, are dozens of clear plastic boxes without lids, each labeled with a number, 1 through 31. Each box corresponds to the day of the current month. Julian told me that siblings should not only complete the current day's work, but assess the following day's work to determine if and what should be done a day in advance, if someone should get to work early to start a complex and time consuming arrangement, and if additional help is needed (e.g. requiring a designer to assist with arrangements for a half-day, or needing an extra driver for a heavy delivery day). It should not be surprising that aside from Julian, other siblings typically do not look a day in advance unless the current day's orders were completed by the early afternoon.

Each day, there are typically three siblings working at the store in addition to the one full-time designer, known as "the Kid," as well as two drivers. In addition to delivering orders, the drivers are also required to do whatever needs to get done, aside from designing arrangements. They take orders over the phone, assist with cleaning and watering flowers, cleaning the shop (which requires daily sweeping and re-organization of materials), taking inventory, blowing up balloons, picking up coffee and food, and a variety of other tasks. The drivers typically get their orders from Nicholas or Julian, but when they're busy, Julian and Nicholas tell Tyler to "give them something to do."

Ongoing Violations and Endless Verbal Conflict

Endless tit for tat jokes, which often erupted into arguments between siblings, took place around me. When I first started working for the florist I was warned by all family members that conflict is a daily part of business. Even though they said I may not be involved in the conflict itself, I should have a “tough skin” in order simply be in the shop and handle the daily battles. Daily arguments have made it difficult for the Thorny Rose to retain some part-time and seasonal employees. For example, during the Valentine’s Day holiday, a seasonal worker hired to assist with phone orders broke down in tears on her second day of work. Julian said that, “she said that she couldn’t take everyone yelling at each other and she couldn’t work here anymore.” [Then Julian laughed.] Sometimes the siblings joke that the only reason they are able to retain one full-time non-family employee, the Kid, is because he’s partially deaf. One day Nicholas told Julian that he determined that everyone needed to have one fight at the start of work, “to get out their resentments or whatever, and then go on with the rest of their day.” However, even when siblings had an early morning fight, it did not seem to alleviate the amount or magnitude of additional fights throughout the day.

Each family members held different beliefs about how others should work—from how a sibling should have interacted differently with a customer, to how someone delayed checking on the progress of one of the delivery drivers, to what flowers could have been used for a particular display. I might be the case that differences in professional opinions may be an expression of sibling rivalry. As previously stated, Julian believed that all family members should assist with critical administrative tasks, while Nicholas and Tyler suggested that such work was not a productive use of time. Julian

believed that customers deserved as much time and attention as was needed to satisfy them, while Nicholas wanted to expedite customer interactions to free up time for other tasks. Tyler believed that it was important to educate customers on the flowers, while Lilia believed that this education might lead them to decide on DIY (do-it-yourself) floral arrangements rather than paying for the expertise of the Thorny Rose. As a result of differences of opinion on these issues, and many others, each sibling felt that others were spending either too much or too little time engaged in some activity. Each sibling had a different interpretation of what was of primary concern in the routine business operations. Because of these differences, the assumptions of what siblings should be working on to achieve “whatever needs to get done,” led to constant violations of expectations. This was a core part of Thorny Rose’s routine business operations.

It was clear when a sibling believed another family member violated their expectations of what work should be focused on because they gave unsolicited feedback (as opposed to solicited feedback given when a siblings was learning something new about the business) to their siblings. The tone of these comments and the emphasis on “could,” “should,” and “ought” words were quickly picked up by the siblings they were directed to, leading to defensive comments and vindictive stories directed back at that person’s own work performance. It is easy to see how constant critiques, especially concerning work, can be unwelcome and a cause for irritation.

In addition to family members making ongoing jabs at each other’s specific work, each other’s work habits were fair game for jocular comments. For example, Tyler was always teased about being lazy at work or taking too many breaks. In the instance below,

Tyler asked Nicholas if she could get lunch. She went upstairs from the shop to her apartment, and came back about 10 minutes later with a plate of home cooked food:

Nicholas “What do you got there Tyler?”

Tyler: “Why? You want some?”

Nicholas: “I don’t know, it smells good.”

Tyler: “I’ll go up and get you some.”

Nicholas: “How about I just eat what you got there and you go back to work.”

Tyler: “Nicholas, you want some or not? But you ain’t eating from my plate.” [And Tyler starts eating faster]

Nicholas: “No, we got sandwiches on the way. Just sit down and eat. Take your time.”

Tyler: “Nicholas, I was upstairs for like, two seconds.”

Nicholas: Smiles.

Tyler: “And what are you doing now?”

Nicholas: Watching you eat.

Tyler: Smiles.

When this sort of teasing occurred in my presence, sometimes one of the family members would turn to me and say, “see how crazy my family is” or “see how mean they are.” Julian would often tell me: “don’t mind our little quips.” And when something got really personal, he said: “Eric, it’s like Vegas. What happens at Thorny Rose, stays in Thorny Rose.” This was not quite true, however, as for all the family members, this type of ongoing teasing took place in and outside of the workplace as well. In many ways the siblings’ interactions and the issues that concerned them in both the business and familial “worlds” were highly permeable.

Often, when a family member perceived a biting comment as criticism, I’d hear the original “joke-teller” say, “I’m kidding. It was a joke.” Or “God, don’t take everything so seriously.” I had to be very careful to participate in joking at the florist, or even laughing at someone else’s teasing for concern that I was “taking sides.” Family members already believed that I typically “sided” with Julian on any divisive issues because, as Nicholas said, I am “attached to Julian’s umbilical cord, so of course Eric’s

going to agree with you.” Out of this concern, I typically withheld any reaction to teasing until it was evident that everyone determined that the teasing was a joke and could not be misinterpreted by its intended audience.

Because My Dad Always Said...

The siblings’ father had died about five years earlier. Although several of the siblings claimed that their father “abandoned” the family, Julian and Nicholas both worked for their father at the florist (Julian worked for more than a decade with his dad). More interestingly, all the siblings respected their father and celebrated the wisdom he had. Of all the family members, Nicholas seems to revere his father the most because of his “good business sense” and “willingness to do whatever is needed for the business,” as Nicholas put it. The siblings recalled their father’s memory by evoking his name daily in comments they would make.

These comments were either directed at siblings with the aim of improving organizational work, or directed at customers to demonstrate empathy and to provide high quality customer service. Nicholas often used his father’s name in reference to how things ought to be done at the shop, and why the siblings should be working harder or more efficiently. The father’s name was also used to evoke his memory in order to emphasize a specific point that a sibling believed was the appropriate thing to do, whether or not it pertained to business decisions per se. Using the name “father” or “dad” was a very purposeful, strategic move, and one that could not be overplayed. When his name was evoked, there were no retorts by any family member. It was as if their father’s word, channeled through their perspectives, was the final word.

The father's name was also used when family members made more prosaic comments. Often these statements could have been made without any parental reference, but it was clear that the use of their father's name provided gravity to a comment made, served as a way to remember their father, and provided an extra level of personal connection to a customer.

Below are excerpts from my fields regarding points being made by siblings demonstrating the way their father's name was used:

- On recognizing that not everyone finds your mistakes laughable...
When things were stressful yesterday and Tyler messed something unimportant up, I believe a small arrangement that could easily be fixed, she said out loud what her error was, and she laughed about it. Nicholas said, "If dad was here, you wouldn't be laughing about it."
- On what to do when you run out of purple flowers...
There was an arrangement that a funeral group ordered and they asked for lots of purple. However, it didn't appear that Tyler had enough for the piece. She wasn't sure what to do, and so Julian said: "Do what your father said. Make something beautiful instead." And what he meant is that instead of worrying about the use of purple flowers, simply making something beautiful was not only what was important, but the customer wouldn't critique an arrangement for missing a color if they thought it looked beautiful (and especially if others attending the funeral told them that the arrangement looked beautiful).
- On the importance of being able to work on the busiest days of the year...
"You don't get sick until after Valentine's day." And when Julian and Raymond [a driver who previously had served jail time] almost got into a fight, Julian said, my father used to say, "you don't go to jail until after Valentine's day." (I don't know if that one was something Julian's father ever really said!)
- On making racist and other derogatory comments about your employees...
[On a particularly long day before Christmas, when everyone was exhausted, and several of the seasonal workers had been clearly underperforming most of the day, working slowly and somewhat carelessly, Nicholas lost his temper.] Nicholas took out his pent-up aggression on the Kid, rather than the new help (likely because the Kid recommended this person) and called the Kid "a little piece of shit Mexican," although the Kid was outside and could not hear Nicholas's comments. Lilia, clearly stunned by this comment, immediately turned around to Nicholas and said, "Dad would have never said that about anyone, ever, Nicholas."

- On avoiding customer conflict...

Julian said that he thinks perhaps the balloons that nobody remembered blowing up but that the driver claims he delivered were never attached to the flower order. He said that there's a good chance the recipient will just call the person who placed the order and thank them and the sender will never know exactly what was sent. Julian said, "My father would say that you shouldn't bring it the attention of the customer. Only if they complain should we do something about it."

- On life's unpredictability...

Customers who shop for funeral pieces and then share stories about the "suddenness" of the death of their loved one, Julian would often respond with: "As my father would say, you never know what tomorrow will bring."

- On how precious and precarious life is...

Often Julian tells customers (and me as well) to be safe, to drive safe, have a safe trip, etc. because "my dad always said that you never know. You could walk outside right now and get hit by a bus, god forbid. And he used to say that when he was diagnosed with cancer, that you can't take things for granted..." I heard this a lot.

To many long-term customers who came to the store to place orders and said they'd see him in a few days when they planned on coming back to pick up their order, he'd say, "god willing." If a customer made a comment back, he said that "my father always used to say, 'You never know what could happen on any given day.'"

A long-time customer told Julian, "your father died too early. Way too early." And Julian replied, "Well, my father used to say that when it's your time to go, it's your time to go."

Guaranteeing Beauty

A critical component of accomplishing daily work at the Thorny Rose was the attention given to customers. While the organization's mission is to create beautiful arrangements, they need to maintain a dedicated customer base. The siblings strongly believed that their florist was differentiated from other florists because of the skill of creating beautiful arrangements and providing customers good value for their money (and to do so, they also claim to have developed strong relationships with their suppliers which has enabled them negotiate good prices for their product). In order to translate

these critical differentiating elements to their customers, the siblings use a variety of phrases with customers that became a part of the fabric of interactions I observed. These phrases were typically used to instill a sense of security in customers who were typically relying on the florist to make an arrangement that they would not view in advance, and which they sometimes would not see the end product of after ordering (since orders were typically delivered to family members, friends or colleagues who did not live with the customer). These phrases included:

- “We’ll take care of you.”
- “We’ll make it beautiful for you.”
- “It’s going to be beautiful.”
- “I guarantee it’ll be beautiful.”
- “That’ll make her feel really special.”
- “I assure you it’s going to Wow her.” (This phrase was especially used during Valentine’s Day or birthday deliveries where customers often requested flowers to be delivered to the office of a girlfriend or wife for the purpose of showing off to coworkers.)
- “Just let the flowers say it all.” (This phrase was used when a customer chose not to include a free 2x3 inch card the store offered with all arrangements. Although the Thorny Rose offered over a dozen varieties of cards for many different special occasions, about one-third of customers did not take a card.)
- “This is a family business and it’s my brothers and sisters that work with me, so any of us will take really good care of you.” (This phrase was used to help reassure customers who specifically asked for the most experienced designer to make their arrangement.)

All the siblings told me that they did not say these phrases “to try to convince anyone that they should buy from us” as Tyler put it. But all the siblings felt strongly that they had the skills and resources to deliver on the promise of making something beautiful.

Conclusion on Thorny Rose’s Routine Business Performance

Although all family members were highly competent florists who were dedicated to perpetuation of their family business, daily operations at the firm were peppered with

conflict. Although the routine business operations were organized around doing whatever needed to get done, there were different expectations of what needed to get done. Julian believed that his siblings should take on more responsibility for critical and extensive legal, tax, and billing paperwork required to run the business. Nicholas believed that if his siblings managed employees with a heavier hand, that they would have more efficient workers and he would not have to be so unpleasant around the shop. Tyler believed that she was successfully completing her responsibilities based on a narrow definition of her obligations. Because of these differing assumptions, expectations were constantly violated. Daily arguments and loud, angered voices filled the shop. Although the siblings regularly said that they wished they did not fight and that there was “too much family drama” at the florist, there was never any work towards resolving these differences in expectations. As a result of these constant fights, the Thorny Rose was sometimes unable to retain quality employees because they could not handle the emotional turmoil around them.

One of the ways family members tried to temper their emotions prior to a fight or to end a fight, was to use their father’s name to channel the siblings’ reverence for him. Through strategic use of their father’s name when making an argument for what should or should not be done, siblings were sometimes able to curb conflict. Their father’s name used in an argument, amounted to a concluding remark, from which no response was deemed appropriate.

Nevertheless, the Thorny Rose put out a high quality product to its customers because of their high level of skill based on regular critiques of finished products from siblings. Because of the siblings’ knowledge that any family member could do anything

that needed to get done, at least as it pertained to creating beautiful arrangements, the Thorny Rose was able to convey their confidence to their customers in their ability to deliver a high quality product at a good price. They took great pride in being able to attend to their customers and had developed a system of phrases regularly used to convey this important information.

Even though siblings at the Thorny Rose take great pride in their work and provide high quality customer service, it would seem that their ongoing conflict may impact the relationships between siblings over the long term. In fact, Lilia had once worked full time in the shop, but at the time I began collecting field notes she had limited her work to two days per week in addition to “pop-in” appointments with prospective wedding clients. Nevertheless, it seems that as long as Julian is capable of handling the major administrative responsibilities of the store, the Thorny Rose should continue to operate successfully.

Routine Business Performance Conclusion

Rolling Hills, AeroGears, ElderCare, and Thorny Rose each present very different challenges to generating order in small businesses. With minimal human, financial, and social capital, firm leaders and employees created a variety of different relationships and learned to perform work together towards to completion of different organizational ostensive, or primary, goals. This feat of organizational order was not typically accomplished consciously, and often it was not harmonious.

Alice, the owner of ElderCare, was the only small business leader to discuss a deliberate attempt to craft an organizational culture. She explained that she actively sought to hire individuals who would continue to perpetuate the culture that she and Jenn,

her administrative assistant and first hire, initially established. On the other hand, Penelope's work force at Rolling Hills consisted of volunteers whom she neither recruited nor cherry picked—whoever emailed her with an interest in assisting on the farm, she invited. Although Penelope had a fairly robust philosophy about how the farm should be managed, she was not able to reinforce her perception of the organization's routine business operations. Volunteers' interpretation of Rolling Hills' routine business performance differed from Penelope's and created a source of tension and conflict. At AeroGears, the firm's owner, Leo, was very aware that his floor manager, Jack, was an ongoing disruption to developing an organizational culture that employees wanted to be a part of; however, Leo did not take any action to correct this ongoing issue that was detrimental to employee retention. Finally, culture creation was not an active point of consideration at Thorny Rose. Four siblings served as the primary workforce, and their interactions could quintessentially be discussed as familial—organizational hierarchy was nonexistent and boundaries between personal and work issues were blurred, resulting in ever-present personality conflicts.

Regardless of whether organizational leaders took an active or passive role in developing and maintaining their firm's routine business performance, discordance and violations of expectations was often a daily occurrence among these small groups of ten to thirty leaders and employees. Nevertheless, a macro view of these organizations would show a picture of stable organizations with growth trajectories. Moreover, such stability would typically suggest that these organizations had processes or rules of operations in place that helped them to manage their resources. Whether it be developing an aerospace part for a military plane, providing health care for the elderly, creating a final floral

memorial for a deceased family member, or providing local families with their weekly produce, work was accomplished by individuals developing a relationally-based performances. The small group cultures, upon which these performances are based, are created from traditions, values, shared references, customs and status systems developed over time.

A shared practice like learning farming techniques from experienced farmhands at Rolling Hills, provided a tradition among the transitory volunteers that enabled them to work cooperatively as part of a holistic work environment. During my time on the farm, it was evident that a long-term volunteer, Aiko, gained esteem from other farmhands, and her high level of social status from agricultural experience was revered. Even though Penelope attempted to use her status among the other field hands to police the efficiency of our work, Aiko resisted Penelope's efforts. In fact, this resistance was commonly seen as acceptable. It was common knowledge among the volunteers that some level of defiance was customary among volunteers.

On the other hand, such confrontational opposition was unacceptable at AeroGears. In fact, those who challenged Jack's authority, the floor manager, were severely chastised. Machinists' concern for getting disciplined led them to focus narrowly on their assigned job, repressing any desire to bring creative problem solving to their work or offer assistance to other machinists that might need help. The machinists also did not bring the issues they had about Jack to Leo, the factory owner, because they knew that Leo was aware of Jack's behavior and did nothing about it. Thus, even though Leo was structurally the organizational leader as the business owner, Jack was symbolically seen as the leader with the most power in the organization. This was particularly true

when the quality assurance manager, Alex, tried to develop important new protocols to expedite work, or when I tried to complete my primary task of instituting the new (or rather decade old, unused) software to help plan and process jobs. At each step in the process, Jack asserted his authority as the necessary gatekeeper to any organizational changes. Thus, employees came to see the organization as a place that did not value change nor supported the efforts of its employees. Individuals who were not comfortable with these values, customs or its status system, often did not remain part of the group. It was only the long-term employees at AeroGears who extolled Leo for his business acumen and securing their employment during the recession that felt loyalty to AeroGears and “dealt with Jack.” In fact, recent hires who did not have this shared reference typically left AeroGears less than a year into their employment.

In contrast to AeroGears, ElderCare was an organization that valued input from its staff and collaboratively worked to solve daily critical staffing issues. As opposed to Rolling Hills, ElderCare maintained a high level of respect between its leader and its employees. While Penelope at Rolling Hills developed a matriarchal leadership style, Alice at ElderCare established herself as a boss who maintained authority in the organizations and who warranted respect. In addition, by actively hiring employees who complemented Alice’s skills and who Alice felt would fit well in the preexisting culture, ElderCare was filled with people whose values aligned. To complete critical work, it was a custom in the office to share difficult stories about clients or home aides to both decrease stress and to update administrative members about clients and personnel. Some notorious stories about clients or employees served as common references, reminding the staff of the difficulty of their work, as well as its critical importance.

The organizational actors that perhaps share the most history are the siblings at the Thorny Rose, whose shared experiences include both personal and professional. Familial traditions in communication, which include petty teasing and insults as well as aggressive critiques and antagonism, are an integral part of daily performance at the florist. A common reference point at the factory is the siblings' reverence for their father—whose name is used by siblings to make a point to one another about (what each consider) proper organizational work (e.g. “Dad would not let us do it like that...”) or peppered in prosaic comments to connect with customers (e.g. to a customer who was buying a funeral arrangement, “My father used to say that when it’s your time to go, it’s your time to go.”) However, it is inappropriate for any non-family employee to engage in the high level of aggressive verbal combat the siblings participate in, and a non-family member certainly cannot refer to something that the siblings’ father would say. These very insular traditions and values seem to result in a difficulty among non-family employees, even seasonal employees, to feel comfortable working at the Thorny Rose.

The idiocultures at each of these organizations is distinct and idiosyncratic, providing important organizational competencies as well as inefficiencies. Despite each firm’s unique and particularistic histories, identities, organizational structures, industries, and skill of employees (or volunteers), each business has identifiable values, traditions, customs, social status systems, and shared references. Because organizational members come to work every day, often for years, and have a high level of interaction with one another, they develop rich, complex small group cultures with deeply held, shared meanings. The discernable components help us identify these small group cultures and give insight into how the cultural performance of an ostensive primary organizational

goal can help to generate order in small firms that have few formal rules and policies. It also helps us to understand how new group members can be socialized into small firms when structured intake processes and training do not exist.

This chapter focused on a performance that is enacted during times of organizational calm, when a firm does not experience internal crises or external pressures outside of normal business activity. However, these normal operations for each small firm cannot always be maintained. Small businesses experience a variety of organizational crises, and they pursue growth initiatives that challenge the routine business performance. Relationship and resource adjustments must be made to accommodate organizational crises or pressures. However, such adjustments may threaten shared organizational values and meaning making among firm actors. Without these shared traditions, references, and values, perpetuation of organizational stability may be uncertain. I turn to these matters in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Routine Crisis Performance

The building of group histories, common values, customs, and traditions provides actors with shared meanings and common understandings of group expectations. In small firms' performances of routine business operations, organizational leaders and employees work to accomplish their firm's primary, or ostensive, goals during times of calm. However, accomplishing primary goals are pursued according to several different performances, based on changing organizational pressures. Urgency and time pressures are characteristics of stress and crises (Hamblin 1958), and require actors to adjust their performances to handle incidents as they arise. Small groups must respond in coordinated ways to incidents that disrupt organizational calm in order to maintain firm stability. Importantly, organizational stress and crises occur routinely. This regularity enables firm actors to develop an alternative to the routine business performance—one that is legitimate, negotiated, meaningful, and that enables actors to successfully handle routine interruptions of calm operations.

Research on organizational stress and crisis has primarily focused on the centralization of firm decision-making and on organizational flexibility. Studies have concentrated on individuals' status in groups and the relationship between superiors and subordinates. Although most stress and crisis research has focused either at the micro level on personal attributes, behaviors, and emotion management (Lazarus 1995), or at the organizational level with large firms' responses to crises (Pearson and Clair 1998), some studies have focused on small group processes and responses under conditions of stress (Hamblin 1958; Torrance 1967; Driskell and Salas 1991).

When evaluating the influence of status on crises management and decision-making, researchers suggest that firm control becomes constricted and decision-making shifts to higher organizational levels (Hermann 1963). This is known as the centralization of authority thesis. Some research supports this perspective, showing that small groups have an increased tendency for subordinate group members to defer to authority when under stress (Hamblin 1958). Simultaneously, leaders are also more likely to reject input from group members (Klein 1976). These findings suggest that firm subordinates prefer to push the responsibility of crisis management to those already in leadership positions. Leaders perhaps believe that they are best equipped to make important decisions under stressful situations rather than solicit or evaluate suggestions from subordinates whom they may believe are less knowledgeable to contribute productively to crisis resolution. Some researchers have even found that stress in groups with clear status differences has led to increased hostility and aggression (Hamblin 1958).

On the other hand, some studies find that stress leads to an increase in equalitarian group-oriented behavior, whereby team leaders are more receptive to task information from others during times of stress, and low status members are also more willing to provide input (Lanzetta 1955). Lanzetta (1955) also found that as stress increased, there was a decrease in arguments, aggressions, and other behaviors associated with internal friction. While these alternative findings promote a flipped perspective from the centralization of authority thesis, since both leaders and subordinates are more open to jointly solving organizational crises, a mixed perspective has also been proposed. Torrance (1967) found that sometimes leaders are more compelled to seek the judgment of others in stressful situations, but subordinates prefer to defer to a leader. This

responsiveness by leaders suggests an increased-receptivity hypothesis (Driskell and Salas 1991); although, subordinates' deference to leaders indicates either a rigid group norm (whereby low status members find it inappropriate to speak up regardless of leaders' pursuit of input), or a desire among subordinates to avoid increased responsibility in decision-making.

Differences in concentration of organizational decision-makers, responsiveness of leaders to subordinates, and willingness of subordinates to contribute ideas to leaders, are all significant variables in understanding small group responses to crises. However, most of the research on stress and crises of small groups are limited in their explanatory power because they are based on experimental studies or case studies of people who do not regularly work together in teams. Notable case studies involving airline pilots and co-pilots involve small groups of people who have no working history. The research suggests that co-pilots and crews make decisions on how to interact based on status differences in organizational role structures, hearsay anecdotes, and personality assumptions (Foushee and Helmreich 1988). While prior research provides some guidance to analyze how small firms may respond to stress and crisis, this dissertation looks critically at the role of small group cultures in providing meaning for interacting actors with shared histories, values, and meanings, as they make organizational decisions.

This chapter examines the way groups in small businesses coordinate their actions through negotiated interactions and meaning creation to accomplish organizational goals during times of stress and crisis. In examining each of my field sites, I found variations in responses to firm stress and crisis. I attribute these differences to each organization's idioculture. Requests from leaders for suggestions from subordinates, appeals to fellow

organizational leaders, workers' abstention from providing recommendations, differing interpretations of whether a crisis even exists, and actions taken after decisions are made, can all be understood within the context of each organization's culture, the values firm actors hold, their relationships to one another, and the meanings they create in their firms.

In order for an alternative group performance to be considered legitimate, the interacting parties need to be in agreement about the appropriate form of action to be taken. An idioculture framework suggests that culture is continuously produced through ongoing negotiations between actors and that social interactions are propelled forward by jointly constructed meanings. Thus, rather than an existing repertoire of activities available to select from and enact during times of stress, firm actors work together towards the aim of understanding appropriate responses to organizational crises. The ways in which they interact to come to develop joint meanings and agreements of how to respond is, of course, based on their shared histories, customs, values, etc. formed through their ongoing interactions. However, just as in the routine business performance, disagreements or conflicts may occur if actors come to understand the same situations differently. Through negotiated interactions, actors seek to come to an agreement on how to appropriately respond to crises in order to accomplish the organization's ostensive goals.

Biggest Fears

Critical operational failures in complex organizations (particularly those involving highly sophisticated technologies) can result in significant physical harm to firm actors, customers, or to the environment (Perrow 1999). The small firms researched in this study

do not have the high level of complexity and tightly coupled systems that typically come to mind when considering possible organizational catastrophes. Nevertheless, some of these firms do provide critical products and services that, without careful care and attention, could result in physical calamity (i.e. AeroGears' creation of parts for military planes and ElderCare's responsibility to attend to those who are physically or mentally unable to care for themselves). While it can be argued objectively that a properly constructed aerospace part is more critical than a properly constructed flower arrangement, all failures in execution can threaten an organization's finances and its sustainability. Thus, I found that regardless of the objective level of critical harm caused by an organizational failure, all firms took the possibility of an organizational failure very seriously.

I came to understand the possibilities for firm failure as each organization's "biggest fear." Each of the firm leaders explicitly spoke about these fears when considering organizational decisions, or as justification for a decision that seemed to contradict a routine business performance. All organizational members came to know what firm leaders considered as their biggest fear. The following are succinct expressions representational of leaders' fears. Verbatim quotes of organizational fears are provided in the chapter during analysis of each field site.

Rolling Hills: A bug in the produce
AeroGears: A plane falling out of the sky
ElderCare: A wandering dementia patient
Thorny Rose: A negative Yelp review

These fears influenced firm activities and lingered as background noise, even during times of calm. Organizational actors got accustomed to these humming fears and did not typically consider them significant issues to deal with. But at times, this humming

rose in volume and became a critical factor in the way firm actors began to think about performing their ostensive goals. Firm operations during times of calm sometimes became stressful, resulting in slight alterations in firm actor performance from routine business operations—I call these simply *stressful situations*. Beyond mere stressful situations, firms also experience organizational crises where the level of potential failure is elevated. When the status of these critical incidents rises in significance from background noise to potential actualization, the cultural performance at each firm is altered from its routine business operations and organized around firm crisis and disaster prevention. During times of crisis, firm actors reposition their relations to one another, shifting their interactions and the joint meanings that defined their activities during times of calm. Through performing organizational activities during times of stress and crisis, small groups come to a shared understanding of how to alter their activities and their meanings to accomplish primary organizational goals under these different organizational conditions.

The *routine crisis performance* represents a distinct way of operating during an organization crisis. To be clear, an organizational crisis suggests a pending organizational failure. An organizational failure is the actualization of the firm's biggest fear. None of the organizations I worked with experienced organizational failures during the 18 months I worked with them, but they certainly experienced routine organizational crises. It became clear to me when an organization believed it was experiencing a crisis because the actors' performance to accomplishing the organization's primary goal was altered.

As described in the literature on group stress and crisis, the relationships and interactions between a leader and subordinates is at the crux of understanding a firm's

response. Distinctive deviations in leadership and changes in actor relations from routine business performances were evidenced in my field sites during firm crises. Thus, the phrases below describing each firm's routine crisis performance reflect the response of each firm's leader and the complimentary response of the other organizational actors (e.g. leader response and subordinate response):

Rolling Hills: Greater oversight and keep the peace

AeroGears: Sharing perspectives and joint decision making

ElderCare: Unilateral action and supportive staff

Thorny Rose: Asserting control and follow the leader

The variations in these performances demonstrate examples of all three styles of crisis responses—deference to authority, equalitarian group-oriented behavior, and increased receptivity to information. What can explain these differences? Small group cultures. The responses to crises and the idiosyncrasies of each small group's alternatives performances from its routine business operations are best understood by analyzing organizations' idiocultures.

In the rest of this chapter I describe the routine crisis performance at each of my field sites that enable employees to generate order and accomplish its firm's ostensive goals during times of heightened stress and crisis. I continue to explore the way that each organization's idioculture provides meanings for action, shared values, common references to reflect on and reaffirm group membership, and a collective history providing insight to performance legitimacy. I structure the analysis of each firm's routine crisis performance into three sections: the first discusses how each firm handles non-crisis organizational stress—for two of the small businesses in this study, organizational stress is a constant part of daily work and handling stress can seem indistinguishable from its routine business performance, while other firms operate with

more distinct differences; the second section discusses an organizational crisis at each firm and how leaders and employees respond, sometimes collaboratively, and other times with discordance; in the final section I summarize each firm's response to organizational stress and crisis, and provide additional analysis on each organization's performance. The chapter ends with a comparison and conclusion that reflects upon the similarities and differences in stress and crisis performances of each field site and briefly discuss how empirical findings can add to the current literature on crisis response in small groups.

Rolling Hills

Primary Goal: *Tasty and attractive produce*

Biggest Fear: *Penelope - "I don't want a CSA member to get home and a worm crawls out of their salad."*

Performance: *Greater oversight and keeping the peace*

Critical Components:

1. *Mondays and CSA Tuesdays unravel the general calm on the farm when Penelope becomes increasingly stressed about avoiding her worst fear.*

2. *The farmhands do not generally believe this increased stress is warranted but capitulate to Penelope's increased demands to avoid "amplifying her stress" as one farm hand explained.*

3. *Holistic farm operations are replaced by Penelope's directives. She assigns those with the greatest expertise to tasks that are believed to be most critical to a successful CSA pickup.*

4. *Penelope also provides greater oversight of tasks than she does during the rest of the week. As a result, conflicts sometimes erupt between Penelope and volunteers when her encroachment goes beyond what farmhands find to be acceptable.*

5. *Despite the diminished level of holistic performance, Penelope does reach out to higher social status members of the organization whom she trusts, and solicits opinions for produce display and quantity recommendations for CSA members.*

Carrot Boy: Creating Task Experts to Ensure Quality Outcomes

Although a significant amount of crops were collected on Tuesdays, the CSA pickup day, significant harvesting and preparation also took place on Mondays. On these

two days, when Penelope needed certain jobs to be completed expeditiously, her attention to task designation was heightened. Although Penelope was keen to assign specific tasks to volunteers throughout the week (as described in the previous chapter), she still asked farmhands for their work preferences. On Wednesdays through Fridays, she often provided opportunities for farmhands to work the task they desired, provided it was not something that required a high degree of delicate attention. If an experienced farmhand was available to assist another volunteer with a task that he or she wanted to do, the request was often granted. However, on Mondays and Tuesdays, the vital collection days, the assignment of job responsibilities became more critical to Penelope—she no longer took volunteers’ suggestions and instead simply assigned tasks.

For example, during my first week at the farm, Penelope suggested I take responsibility for collecting and sorting carrots. Aiko was my “teacher.” Carrot collection involves careful hoeing to ensure carrots are not broken while they are dug up from the ground, having physical strength to transport hundreds of carrots by wheel barrel for cleaning, a long process of cleaning soiled-encased carrots with a garden hose and cold-water, and then sorting out carrots with “little brown holes” that suggest the possibility of a worm (or worm eggs) inside. Once the carrots were cleaned and sorted, they then needed to be bundled using rubber bands, about four to six carrots per bundle depending on the length and width of the carrots. This entire process can easily take five hours, and sometimes carried over to the next day. Penelope observed my work during the first week that I was assigned this as my primary task. I came to realize that I excelled at carrot collection in sorting—a skill that all my years in graduate school did not prepare me for, but something that I came to see as an expertise of mine. Because of my continued

adeptness at this task, I was given the responsibility to train new volunteers in proper hoeing, cleaning, sorting, and bundling. I became affectionately known as “carrot boy” after Penelope gave me the title at breakfast one morning.

Despite Penelope’s need to delegate this particular work to me each week because of my high level of competency, it seemed that assigning me carrot collection violated Penelope’s usual holistic performance of designating work responsibility on the farm. Each week during Mondays’ breakfasts, Penelope assigned me the task of “carrot duty” as she would call it, but gave it to me with some hesitation. She seemed to recognize that this assignment ran contrary to the routine business performance. Below is an example of one Monday breakfast conversation:

Penelope: “Eric, I have you down for carrot duty...if that’s okay.”

Eric: “Sounds good.”

Penelope: “I know you’ve done it a lot already. Do you want to do something else?”

Eric: “I’ll look to do something else on another day. Carrots it is.”

Penelope: “I want to make sure that you experience other things, but...you’re good at it and I don’t want to worry about it today.”

Eric: “Yes. That works for me. I enjoy...”

Penelope: “Okay, thank you. That’s one less thing for me to worry about. Oh, maybe once John finishes the peppers he can help you and you can show him how to bundle the carrots. Does that sound good?”

Eric: “Sounds good to me.”

These sort of extended, back and forth conversations routinely took place on Mondays and Tuesdays as Penelope assigned responsibilities. As I recorded in my field notes, I was satisfied to complete “carrot duty” because I understood that it was important to “get the necessary work of CSA prep done.” In conversations with other farm hands, I knew that they also shared this perspective.

Most farmhands told me that they accepted their assigned task without fuss, even if they preferred to do something else, because they did not want to “stress Penelope out

any more than she stresses herself out” as one farmhand told me. Farmhands might have been concerned for Penelope’s own mental health, but they more critically wanted to placate her to make their own days easier. Mondays were routinely stressful days for Penelope. Her concern for a pending crisis elevated, and as is demonstrated below, her relationship to the farmhands began to change. Stress was elevated further each week on “CSA Tuesdays,” when Penelope believed that we were actively engaged in crisis management, as we finalized preparation for CSA members.

On the other hand, farmhands did not believe that these days needed to be particularly stressful. Furthermore, we did not see CSA Tuesdays as crisis events. We all felt that we could collect and sort the necessary produce, set up the CSA garage prior to the 12 noon start time for pickups, and greet and assist patrons as needed without cause “for drama” as one volunteer explained it. It was Penelope’s altered perception, one that the farmhands did not hold, that constituted a change in the performance of the organization’s primary goal of providing tasty and attractive produce.

4000 Eggs: Inappropriate Framing of Constructive Criticism in “a Crisis”

On most Mondays and Tuesdays during harvest season, Penelope was clearly anxious. Her level of apprehension reached its peak on Tuesdays. In fact, on my second day at the farm, when I was sorting peaches, Penelope confided in me (or maybe warned me) that she can “get a little crazy on Tuesdays with the CSA.”

On one CSA morning, Felipe told me that Penelope is “crazy,” moving his pointer finger toward his temple and circling it around making the universal signal for crazy. He told me how she yelled at him when he was about to enter into the CSA pickup area. He

mimicked her: “Filipe! Don’t. Don’t come in! Don’t mess up my floor! I just clean! Stay outside.” On another Tuesday I heard her yell at Jacob, a farmhand, when he almost stepped into the “showroom,” as Penelope sometimes called the CSA pickup area.

Although the ostensive goal of the organization is clear to everyone, producing the highest quality farm products for CSA clients, during the critical CSA Tuesday collection day, Penelope assumes greater levels of oversight and more explicit direction than usual. The result of this organizing conflicts with the expectations that farm workers developed during times of calm—which ostensibly centered around holistic work activities and personal growth. I became aware of ongoing conflicts between farmhands and Penelope. Volunteers often whispered their complaints when harvesting in the fields about Penelope’s “ability to handle stress.”

Damien, a volunteer from France who worked on the farm with his fiancée for a three-month stay, was often responsible for collecting and cleaning eggs because he had some minor back muscle issues that prevented him from working in the fields for long periods of time. On one CSA Tuesday, he was cleaning eggs at the sink, preparing cartons for CSA member pickup. This task primarily included scrubbing each egg with a brush vigorously enough to remove dried fluids and other debris that affixed to the eggs when they were released by the chickens and sat in the pen prior to being picked up. Damien was now into his eighth week working on the farm at the time of this incident. Penelope was checking up on the activities of some of the vegetable sorters in the garage and then walked over to Damien:

Penelope: “Oh, be sure to really clean them good and be sure...”

Damien: Abruptly interrupted Penelope, looked up at her from his stooped position on the stool over the sink, “I’ve cleaned like 4000 eggs! I know how to do this!” And then turned his head back to the sink and continued scrubbing the egg.

Penelope: Stiffens in that brief moment of anger directed towards her. “Okay.” Gently pats Damien once on the shoulder in an attempt to sooth him, then walks away.

When Damien had raised his voice at Penelope, a few farmhands, including myself, fell silent. Although many of us performed some minor resistance to Penelope during routine business operations, it never involved actively talking back to her and certainly did not involve raising our voices. This was quite different.

I asked Damien later that day why he had lashed out at Penelope in the manner he did. He reiterated that he had done the task so many times before, and it was “not necessary to tell me what to do.” Furthermore, he said that he knew she was, “watching me all morning, like she watches everyone on Tuesdays, which was really irritating. So I was waiting for her to finally say something. When she did, I just got mad.” He went on to say that he believed he got frustrated because he felt that Penelope unnecessarily imposes directives on the volunteers. “And it’s not like this work is difficult. It’s washing eggs!” and he laughed. When I asked Penelope why she thought Damien yelled at her, she said that, “he was right...” Not that he should have yelled, but that he had done this task “endlessly in the past, and I should not have interfered.” Penelope went on to say that, “I do have suggestions on how he could clean them more quickly. But I don’t think he’ll listen to me.” I later learned in conversations with Penelope, that she was concerned that there would not be enough eggs ready for the CSA members or that those eggs that were cleaned, were not cleaned well enough. This potential shortage or lack of clean eggs likely caused Penelope to feel that an organizational failure was pending.

Although Penelope’s aim was to provide meaningful suggestions to Damien on how to perform his job efficiently, she was rebuked. Perhaps it was the way in which she went about making the recommendation. Rather than leading into the conversation as a

suggestion for improvement, like she did regularly during routine business operations, she spoke in a more directive manner. Nonetheless, Damien seemed to already be sensitized to any comments about his work, because of the stressful environment created by Penelope. Damien, like the rest of the volunteers, did not believe there was reason to view CSA Tuesdays as an impending crisis. Damien believed he was performing his rote task successfully, like the rest of us believed as well. He would prevent CSA members from taking home eggs that had dried chicken feces on it, I was sure to remove all carrots with brown spots from the showroom so that no CSA member would have a worm crawl out of their salad, and all the other volunteers would continue to perform their tasks to ensure tasty and attractive produce was provided without bugs.

Although Penelope was very anxious and seemed to be the primary cause of disruption to the general holistic calm among the volunteers on Tuesdays, Penelope did solicit suggestions from higher-status volunteers about the setup, or visual display of the produce to be collected by CSA members. On many Tuesdays, Penelope would ask me, Aiko, and Becca (a volunteer who was only around for two months during the summer, but who had worked on farms in prior summers), about how to position the different vegetable and fruit crates in the pickup area to make the produce most attractive, how much produce to put out at any given time (keeping the rest to replenish emptying crates), and how much of certain produce was appropriate to offer members so they felt they had a substantial quantity (for example, I often recommended volunteers could take one large and one small zucchini, a “sizing concept” that Penelope adopted each week for other produce that came in varying sizes).

Each week, there were new questions that Penelope had for a few of us that she trusted, and could provide recommendations that she often incorporated into her displays. This solicited involvement led the three of us to feel a greater sense of obligation to ensuring the CSA pickup events were successful, and led us to voluntarily offer advice as well. However, the majority of farmhands whose opinions were not sought out did not make recommendations to Penelope. They also never told me that they felt slighted by Penelope for not asking. Instead, I believe they were content to maintain their identity as Penelope's assistants without feeling the desire to be more invested in the farm than they already were.

Summary of Routine Crisis Operations at Rolling Hills

Penelope saw Mondays and CSA Tuesdays as requiring her to provide greater oversight and explicit work directives that did not occur on non-critical collection days. Volunteers did not find the heightened stress level to be warranted, and we certainly did not sense crisis each CSA Tuesday. Instead, farmhands continued to operate in a holistic performance, to the best of their ability, while capitulating to Penelope's demands. However, as was demonstrated in the 4000 eggs example, sometimes volunteers' could not maintain their veil of calm, and tempers elevated. The result was occasional intragroup aggression that did not rise to this level during routine business operations.

However, Penelope also actively sought limited advice from volunteers who she came to depend on and respect. This change in relationship was also something unique to the routine crisis performance, as I have no other records of Penelope asking for suggestions from volunteers during times of calm.

AeroGears

Primary Goal: *A precise part*

Biggest Fear: *Leo - “We don’t want a plane to fall out of the sky with our parts in it.”*

Performance: *Sharing perspectives and joint decision making*

Critical Components:

1. *The managers at AeroGears perform under the constant stress of late order deliveries, and the machinists contend with Jack’s caustic attitude. Thus, stress was an integral part of the routine business operations culture.*

2. *Completing work for commercial clients, whether small one-off jobs or large, regular orders, were generally completed haphazardly or in a reactive way to placate the complaints of clients—without an explicit method to complete jobs (by priority, complexity, etc.) contributing to the firm’s stressful environment.*

3. *Completing work for aerospace clients requires a high level of planning and critically important documentation for proper traceability.*

4. *Because of the seriousness of producing parts for planes, potential crises occur with aerospace parts productions, include making imprecise parts or parts that lack appropriate traceability.*

5. *Aerospace parts crises are handled at AeroGears with leaders effectively collaborating, rather than the routine business operations where management sticks to their own tasks.*

6. *Nevertheless, ultimate organizational decisions are made by Jack and Leo, even if Alex provides critical recommendations for handling the crisis.*

Making Parts By the Seat of Our Pants - A Routinely Stressful Environment

“Is There Any Paperwork on This?”: A History of Disorganization

Accomplishing daily work at AeroGears focused on a routine business operations of sticking to your task. This performance was enacted by both the factory floor workers and by the management level employees. This idioculture seems to have worked effectively during most of AeroGears’ fifty-year history, which focused on commercial parts for both small, one-time projects for local businesses, as well as larger, repeat productions (dozens to hundreds of pieces) for national manufacturers. Leo described to me that they would often pile the work jobs on a table next to his desk, and they would go through the pile as machinery became available. And if a client called up asking about a part, “We would shuffle through the pile and put their job on top, making their job a

priority” [laughs]. Parts production was always “from the seat of our pants,” as Alex explained.

This jobs pile was only changed in the past two years. Even if job were delivered to the floor in a more fluid way, the general scheduling and tracking of jobs by Jack was still chaotic and disorganized—it left Alex and Leo with little information to report to inquiring customers about job status without interrupting Jack (wherever he might be running around the factory), and get him to provide updates from his magical yellow pad. Moreover, while managers worked unsystematically to complete scheduled jobs, factory floor employees had to contend daily with Jack’s acerbic attitude and his frequent chastisement of workers. Thus, AeroGears was characterized as being rather stressful, even during times of calm.

As a result of the “stick to your task” routine business performance and AeroGears’ subsequent reactionary and disorganized way of operating, even very small-scale, routine commercial jobs became messy and complicated. The following story taken directly from my field notes was typical of the very simplest of commercial jobs AeroGears handled that demonstrates the typical method of operating.

Earlier this morning, a guy came up the stairs with Jack. [Jack] was looking for some parts that this random guy (that I’ve never seen before) said Leo had “worked up” for him. Jack seemed not to know what he was talking about, and after looking around for a while, Jack looked in Leo’s cabinet next to his desk and saw four random parts. The guy saw them too and said that those were them [the parts he needed]. He said that he was surprised that Leo had not called him to let him know when they were complete.

Jack then walked the guy over to Colleen [the secretary] and said, “This guy wants to give you money” [and smiled]. Colleen said, “Okay, but I don’t know who he is. Is there any paperwork on this?” Jack said that there isn’t but that the guy said Leo quoted him at \$260. The guy himself said this amount out loud. Jack said “it’s a one-off job” so just write something up. And then Jack left and went back downstairs to the floor without saying another word. Colleen, in her usual excited tone, said, “Hold on, hold on. Okay, let me find my pad. Geez, you think that would have something on this.” At which point Alex, who sat quietly during the entire transaction looks over at me and raises his

eyebrows, sort of questioning Colleen, like “really, you thought they would have a purchase order for this?”

In any event, Jamie then wrote something by hand that looked like a receipt (from one of those generic pink receipt pads you might get from Staples or something), and then charged him \$260. The guy paid in cash.

The guy told Colleen (who didn’t seem to care) he needed these nut-bolt parts for some custom made microphone stands that he bought off of a guy in the neighborhood. The customer said that he’s a friend of Leo’s and he’s a freelance music producer and does a lot of work with [the local jazz center]. He said the nut-bolt things that came with the stands were crappy and didn’t keep the stands positioned correctly.

The silo-ing of actors’ work is evident by the lack of information Jack (or anyone else) had about this project and the little information Jack conveyed to Colleen about how to complete the transaction. In addition, Colleen did not share with Jack how she will write up and document the receipt of the transaction. The lack of collaboration also resulted in the customer not being told by Leo that his pieces were finished—he happened to just stop by the shop and check. This customer’s drop-in took Jack’s attention away from other critical work—which he ran back to as soon as he handed the customer off to Colleen. All aspects of this transaction are demonstrative of a routine business performance that is characterized by actor’s limited scope of responsibilities, disorganization, and low-level stress.

SOPs and Traceability – Adding Processes and Increasing Stress

Although commercial work, both small projects, like the one described above, as well as regular large jobs that may include cutting hundreds of pieces (for gun manufacturers, espresso machine producers, factory equipment for a canning company, etc.), constitutes a large number of jobs processed at AeroGears, the organization’s bigger money maker recently is its aerospace work. At AeroGears, generating a stable environment to produce high-quality aerospace parts was the organization’s greatest

concern. Parts made for commercial products typically had lower levels of complexity. In addition, some imprecision did not affect the final products' performance. Thus, while it was important that all commercial parts fit within the approved variance provided by the blueprint specs, some additional flexibility was built into what AeroGears considered an acceptable finished part, especially among those parts that AeroGears routinely made for some organizations. However, for aerospace parts, accuracy was imperative and anything less than precision could cause a major plane malfunction. As the quality manager (somewhat) jokingly said, "We have to be super precise with the aerospace parts because the government doesn't want anything bringing down these big planes except for some crazed Muslim." Although this tagline was used as the organization's greatest fear, its effect was meant not only to remind employees of the critical importance of making precise parts, but also to be a reminder of the importance of accurate documentation and traceability so that if a plane does fall out of the sky (and unfortunately malfunctions do occur), an audit by the government would not find fault with AeroGears.

Aerospace work at AeroGears was exclusively government contract-based, outsourced down a hierarchical line of smaller manufacturers with a large airplane manufacturer at the top of the pyramid (e.g. Boeing). The outsourced organizations that AeroGears worked for required not only precision of product but also precision of documentation. The SOPs that guide the process of accurate traceability for the aerospace industry is derived from requirements of the AS9100 certification. AeroGears received their certification three years prior to the start of my data collection. Failure to abide by the AS9100 criteria could result in either a poor certification score during a routine certification review—which manufacturers could use as a justification to limit the amount

of work they give to AeroGears—or a loss of certification credentialing which would immediately result in an end to all aerospace work. Based on the SOPs, all uncut metals brought to the factory must be accompanied by a certification, or cert, that provides information about where the material was extracted from, who formed it into metal rods, which company shipped it, etc. In addition to accurate certs, aerospace suppliers also require AeroGears to keep exact Purchase Order records, which include information about how each uncut metal piece was used, which machine cut the material, which employee performed each cutting task, etc. This is to provide the government with the ability to trace each step of a part's creation, “all the way back to the ground it came out of” as Alex explained.

As described in the previous chapter, many of the processes in the organization remain informal and generally under the control of the floor manager, Jack, leading to a generally stressful workplace. While Jack still maintains ultimate control over scheduling parts, the processing of documenting aerospace pieces is primarily driven by the AS9100 SOPs. The precision needed in record-keeping at AeroGears, compared with their 50-year history of piling up jobs on a table and rummaging through them each day to complete, was difficult to initially implement. Alex, the quality assurance manager was specifically hired to help AeroGears create the necessary process to gain its AS9100 accreditation. Alex said that getting everyone on board with understanding the importance of accurate documentation “made me want to shoot myself, or shoot other people. I’d rather go to the beach.” In fact, three years later he continues to double check AS9100 documentations that other employees are responsible for handling.

Although the need for proper documentation has increased the responsibilities of all machinists and managers, the implementation of SOPs has not been met with much resistance. Managers often quibble about some documentation they find to be duplicative, time wasting, and generally unnecessary, but they capitulate because they want the lucrative aerospace work. Machinists told me that the additional documentation is “not a big deal,” but errors persisted in those documents. Compliance with the SOPs and the general acceptance managers and employees have for following these operating rules and accurate documentation are key to ensuring that AeroGears avoid its biggest organizational fear, but they have not always been able to meet the aerospace standards. Thus, despite SOPs in place to ensure accurate traceability, AeroGears occasionally fails in its responsibilities, resulting in routine crises.

To Rework or Not to Rework? – Making a Collaborative Judgment in a Gray Zone

In the following story, AeroGears was contracted to make 250 pieces of a landing gear part for an aerospace supplier named Orland Parts. This was a \$175,000 job. As a step in the process of completing the part, AeroGears sent the machined pieces to an approved vendor called Zenith Machining for heat treatment—a company that AeroGears regularly outsources to treat parts. As AeroGears completed the work on their end, they sent batches of the pieces to Zenith. In the end, they sent three separate batches, or purchase orders (POs) to Zenith for heat treatment. Each PO has its own numerical assignment. Upon receipt of these batches, Zenith Machining rejected part of one batch because they arrived with imperfections (as a result of poor work at AeroGears). These

items were reworked at AeroGears and sent back to Zenith for heat treatment as another PO. The total job now had four separate POs.

Once complete, Zenith Machining shipped the heat-treated parts to AeroGears. However, three of the four POs arrived together in the same group of boxes (130 pieces in total) with three certification documents all in one box. Each PO should have been shipped separately with its own cert. As noted earlier, the importance of proper documentation (both proper certs and POs) to comply with AS9100 regulations require traceability of each part to its original source. When these heat-treated pieces came to the factory Alex told me that he originally thought that the order should be accepted and sorted. He planned to randomly assign the received parts to each PO and cert. However, the next morning Alex told me that he realized, "that's not the right thing to do. The right thing to do was to reject the shipment and send it back to Zenith Machining with a new PO..." to be stripped and heat-treated with new certs drawn up to track the specific groups of parts from Zenith Machining back to AeroGears. Although AeroGears had documentation specifying the machines and the machinists who made each batch, these batches were now mixed up. Luckily, all the material for these pieces came from the same raw materials suppliers in one shipment. So new certs could be drawn up for all the parts. If there was any confusion about what raw materials were used for the parts, AeroGears would have had to consider scrapping thousands of dollars worth of pieces. Instead, AeroGears could ask for approval from their customer to allow the pieces to be reprocessed as long as they were reworked by Zenith.

Later that morning, Jack was upstairs standing next to Alex's desk, both looking at Alex's computer reviewing documents pertaining to the orders. Jack was not initially

concerned about the confused POs and certs at all. In fact, he reviewed the shipment before Alex did, and did not raise any issue. Once Alex brought up his unease to Jack, Jack first suggested that it might just be a clerical error by AeroGears and they could simply fix it on their end without rework. Together, they looked through the documents loaded on Alex's computer. The documents seemed to suggest that AeroGears originally sent three POs and one cert—although each PO should have been accompanied by its own cert. Alex said that if a mistake was made on AeroGears' end, AeroGears would need to document the error—that was required of them, even if the error was simply clerical. He said that AeroGears could not just use the parts, "and simply pretend that nothing's wrong." And Jack replied: "...You're right. It's an exposure. It should be reworked."

Alex told me that Zenith Machining "does good work and all those pieces are likely good" so, he initially thought it wouldn't be a problem to randomly sort the parts. I asked him if that was the reason why he just wanted to split them up the evening before when they came in. Alex responded: "No. It's because I don't want to have to go through all the extra work of dealing with the paperwork again. It took me thirty hours to go through the paperwork on this the first time. Now I've got to go back to my files and notes. And we paid [Zenith Machining] \$25,000 [for the heating job] and I have to spend more time dealing with this? Let them take care of it." Although Alex's initial response reflected his frustration in dealing with this error, he went on to say that: "we shouldn't sweep it under the rug... even though this will put us behind, because it'll take fifty-six days to get this job reworked." Alex added that you also have to remember that these are

going on F-18s. And even if you know that the product is good, “if something did happen, you don't want to be the one that made that decision.”

Alex contacted Orland Parts and asked for approval to have the pieces stripped and heat-treated, rather than scrapped. They gave him authorization.

After additional reviewing of documentation, it seems that three POs were initially sent to Zenith Machining for heat processing with only one cert. However, three certs should have been sent, each with a PO number on them designating its assigned batch of parts. Even if the information on each cert was essentially identical—each PO needed to be accompanied by a cert. Zenith Machining did not pick up this mistake when it initially received the shipment. Only when the pieces began being processed did they contact AeroGears and ask for the certs. But with the pieces at Zenith already being processed, it seems that the POs were not properly kept separate, waiting for the certs to be matched with them. To further complicate the matter, a portion of one PO was sent back to AeroGears prior to heat treatment for rework. At that time, another should have been produced for this new PO.

Both AeroGears and Zenith made mistakes. Quality assurance personnel and shipping and receiving employees from both organizations are responsible for checking that all paperwork was in order before shipments were sent or received. By the end of the day, all these details finally came to light and Jack and Alex came to understand the mistakes made. Now, late in the day, Jack evaluated the situation out loud, a conversation I was able to capture:

Jack: "We machined [these parts] on the same machines...everything was the same. The only question about that is, because we have different sign-offs on the same routing line [the section on a work order that requires a machinist to sign off as a PO is completed], does that matter...If you look at the router, you made so many, you made so many

[different batches] and then when we rework, we rework so many...[A]nd just from an abundance of caution, I told them [Zenith Machining] that [some of the original parts that Zenith rejected] were reworked, but we knew exactly what was what. That's why we assigned them numbers and we knew what went where and we documented them all the way through...In terms of sending one cert, I wonder if an auditor would say, you worked on these 40 here [arbitrarily picking a batch quantity among the 250 total pieces made] and this 40 there...when they say you have to maintain traceability...The way that document's written, we could mix them altogether...when the Navy gets them, they just put them all on a shelf. It's all to maintain the integrity of the process.”

Alex: "Absolutely. That's all what it's all about..."

It seems that the purpose of this oral review of the situation was aimed at coming to accept some of the AS9100 rules that Jack perhaps believed to be unreasonable. He questioned why it was necessary to rework pieces that were already accounted for, simply for documentation purposes, if at the end the Navy just puts all the pieces “on a shelf” together. Alex reaffirms that it is the “integrity of process,” as Jack suggests, because it helps avoid a slippery slope of increasingly poor documentation and covering up errors.

This active discussion was conducted in a calm, systematic, and collaborative way—a manner of interacting quite different from the routine business operations at AeroGears. Jack is not yelling at anyone and Alex is not being snide about the organization. When the crisis is recognized and dealt with, it appears that top management adjusts their operations away from sticking to their task, and towards joint problem solving.

The morning after this day-long crisis, I asked Alex if he and Jack were going to continue their conversation to determine how to resolve the issue. Alex said that a final decision was made the previous evening once Leo finished his all-day meeting outside the company and returned to AeroGears. However, Alex, who is very protective of his non-work hours and leaves promptly at 5 o'clock (as described in Chapter 3), was left out of the final decision-making conversation. This did not seem to bother him. Alex jokingly

said that being a quality manager means he “doesn't want to make the final decision,” and instead, he wants “to pass it on to the next guy.” He jokingly said that people like to blame “‘the quality guy’ for any mistake, but I know better than to be around when a final decision is made.” He said he does not want the burden placed on him to decide if they should push these pieces through, even if the paperwork was a little shaky. He said, “you saw that Jack could go either way on this. Everyone could go either way on this. But to me, it doesn't matter if the job is late or not. It doesn't affect my bank account. So what do I make this decision on? My integrity. It's the right thing to do. I'm Alex and I leave at five. That's my world.”

I asked Alex why he thought that Jack initially seemed willing to accept the original heat-treated shipment. Alex said that, “under pressure, you might decide to just sweep it under the rug. And that's what Zenith might do. I don't know. They might make that decision... Yesterday they thought to do this, but a day later they changed their minds. Cool heads prevailed.” Thus, even though Jack initially suggested that the parts were all machined on the same equipment and by the same individuals and thus the pieces would not bring down a plane, his consultation with Alex likely led him to decide to follow proper protocol. Thus, Jack and Leo decided that the parts should be reworked. I found out later that because errors were made by both AeroGears and Zenith, Jack negotiated the rework costs with Zenith. The result was a very late delivery, a decrease in the amount of profit from this project, and a mark against AeroGears with Orland Parts (which could play a role in AeroGears' ability to take on new work if more negative marks are accumulated). But as Alex noted, the parts AeroGears was making “went into Black Hawks and F-18s and anti-crash devices and planes...so it mattered.”

Summary of AeroGears Routine Crisis Performance

The concern to produce parts that were carefully traceable may help to ensure the quality of the pieces produced so that no “plane with AeroGears parts would fall out of the sky,” but a piece’s traceability was also required for AS9100 compliance. Proper documentation stood as a proxy for the general accountability and capacity that a factory is capable of producing quality aerospace pieces. While Jack routinely makes unilateral decisions about shop floor activities, in the situation described, Alex and Jack effectively worked together to try and determine what exactly went wrong, and how to resolve the crisis. Alex explicitly approached Jack after recognizing they had a critical issue to address, and Jack asked Alex his opinion on how they should settle the crisis. I do not have any record in my field notes of Alex calling any non-crisis to Jack’s attention, nor did I document Jack asking Alex his opinion about machined work, whether for aerospace or commercial parts during routine business operations.

Even though in his conversation with Jack, Alex advocated for following the proper protocol to ensure the traceability of each batch, he still resisted taking a more active and assertive position in his conversations with Jack—even though one-on-one with me, it was clear that Alex wanted the pieces reworked based on his own sense of integrity for the process and his own identity as a quality assurance manager.

In fact, because Alex is responsible for quality assurance, the decision about whether to reject the pieces or accept them falls within his written job responsibilities. Nevertheless, the final decision to resolve the crisis ultimately resided with Jack and Leo. Within the context of the organization’s history, the social status of its actors, and the prior relationships actors have to each other, it seems legitimate that Alex wished to the

leave the final decision up to Jack and Leo (especially because in Alex's world, he "leaves at 5 o'clock"). Jack and Leo likely preferred that Alex left before a final decision was made, given their tight control on AeroGears.

ElderCare

Primary Goal: *Compassionate care*

Biggest Fear:

Jenn - *"We don't want a news story about one of our clients who's wandered off into the woods."*

Alice - *"I don't need my face on the news saying that we killed somebody."*

Eric - *"We don't want some news story with hidden camera footage of one of the aides hitting an elderly client."*

Performance: *Unilateral action and supportive staff*

Critical Components:

1. *The leaders at ElderCare perform under the constant stress of needing to make appropriate matches between home health aides and clients, with concern for both quality care and aides' satisfaction.*

2. *Alice and Jenn contend daily with ensuring aides' compliance with care plans, showing up on time, and minimizing late cancellations requiring last minute replacements. They also must provide the necessary information to clients and their families so they can make informed home care decisions.*

3. *Although the crisis performance is highly collaborative, Alice makes definitive choices instead of assuming her usual shades of gray logic and seeking suggestions from her staff.*

4. *Alice also institutes a new policy after the crisis, demonstrating the organization's ability to learn from crisis situations.*

Compliance, Home Alone, and Quality Care: Everyday Low-Level Stress in Home Health

Like AeroGears, the routine business performance at ElderCare seems to operate with a perpetual undertone of stress. The transactions with clients and aides at ElderCare occurred continuously—nearly two dozen aides were required to show up to a client's house and provide quality care each day. Because it was difficult to find highly competent and committed home health aides (as discussed in the previous chapter), leaders contended with employees calling out from work, showing up late, or failing to

follow care plans for patients on a daily basis. Despite constant organizational stress, the routine business culture generated order that enabled the organization to operate productively.

Below are a few brief examples of daily incidents that occurred at ElderCare, and the way the routine business operations provided effective order to deal with these issues.

On Ensuring Aides' Compliance:

An aide was asked to fill in for another aide who was unavailable for her usual client. Although the replacement aide was debriefed the previous day about the client's condition and the need to always watch him (a conversation I heard over the phone), Jenn also texted the replacement aide that morning when she first arrived to the client's house. The text was to remind the aide that the client was a fall risk and the aide needed to be with him at all times during her shift.

Later that day, Jenn received a call from the client's daughter saying that when she came to visit her father, the aide was in the kitchen eating while her father was in the adjacent room on the couch watching television. A wall between the two rooms prevented the aide from keeping an eye on the client. Jenn apologized to the client's daughter. They agreed that the current aide will stay at the home for now and Jenn will re-explain to the aide the importance of always being in the same room with the client. Jenn then gets off the phone and says to the room:

"What?! What part of Mr. Taylor is a fall risk and you need to be with him all the time don't you understand! After I spoke about it with you yesterday, you then respond back to a reminder text about it with 'OK' and then at 11 o'clock you sit down in the kitchen to eat your soup and sandwich and you can't see Mr. Taylor! I'm going to take a pretty little pill when I'm 80 years old and I'm gone. Because if you leave me with one of these aides, I'm going to hurt them. Or they're going to hurt me!"

Jenn called the aide after venting to us, and reminded her of the imperative that she stay with the client at all times. However, from listening to Jenn's responses during the phone call, it seemed that Jenn encountered some resistance from the aide about the need to be in the room with the client, even if he was sitting or lying down. Once Jenn got off the phone she walked over to Alice's office and spoke very briefly with her. When she came out, she turned to me and said that they felt bad that the client was going to get a third aide in three days, but the current aide, "needs to go."

On Being Home Alone

One morning, early in my data collection, an aide called the office at 8:30 AM to say she could not make it to her 9:00 AM client because the aide's aunt had died. An elderly woman, who requires an aide four days a week to help her with her morning routine, exercise and appointments, was expecting the aide. Jenn told me that, "Another week it was [the aide's] grandmother [that she claimed died]. Either way, I can't call [a replacement aide] up at 8:30am to be somewhere at 9am. It's time to go home. Let's call it a day."

Although Alice was not in the office yet, Jenn called one of the part-time nurses and asked that she go to the client's house at 9:00 AM, while Jenn would call around to find a replacement as soon as possible. The nurse said it would be no problem, and Jenn was able to find a new aide who arrived at 11:00 AM.

On Concern for Client Care (...Primarily)

I overheard a call that Alice made to the daughter of a long-term client whose sister has been the primary manager of her father's care. Alice had met both sisters when she first provided them an aide for their father. Alice was in touch with both sisters over the past few months providing updates on their father's care, as well as helping to schedule doctor appointments, etc. But Alice knew that the sisters did not always communicate well with each other and had disagreements over their father's care.

Alice called the daughter who is the secondary care manager to let her know that her sister changed the care that their father was receiving—to just two hours a day, three days a week. (This amount is very low, and Alice would not have allowed this small amount of hours for a new client. But this is an existing client, and many times hours of care fluctuate with long term clients.) Alice explained that she wanted the sister to know about the change because she wasn't sure "if that provided the sort of security she was looking for....so I just wanted to let you know." When Alice got off the phone, Alice told the room that the sister said: "'That won't work for me.'"

Jenn: "Are you starting sister fights?"

Alice's nephew: "Sisters don't need someone to instigate a fight, they just fight."

Jenn: "Ohhhh, she's going to be mad at you. You told on her!"

The next day Alice got a phone call from the primary care manager daughter and she asked to add an additional hour each day of care. The daughter did not mention Alice's conversation with her sister, and Alice said that the daughter did not appear upset.

In this situation, Alice sought to manage care of the elderly client, the psychological well being of the client's children, the financial viability of her business, and the home health aide's financial stability and commitment to the organization. On

this last point, aides whose clients cut their hours often feel like they have done something wrong, even though this is usually not the case—if an aide did something wrong, they would be replaced, not simply have their hours reduced. Alice also preferred to bump up the number of hours the client needed per week so that the aide felt that she had a substantial enough weekly pay that she would remain committed to ElderCare and not pursue job opportunities at other home health care organizations. Luckily, with a little tattling, Alice got a slight bump in hours to improve client care, as well as organizational finances, the client's family psychological well-being, and the aides' take home pay.

In the relationships established at ElderCare, stressful concerns were managed on a daily basis through a collaborative routine business performance. No adjustment to allocation of resources or relationships to make decisions during stressful times was needed. The routine business performance supported not only the accomplishment of daily work, but also a high level of acceptable humor about each other's work that helped to defray ongoing organizational stress. The high level of quality relationships, respect for one another, and communication importantly enabled organizational actors to function cohesively during stressful times.

“You’re Not Mia”: Decisive Management When Encountering an Impersonator

A last-minute request came in from the children of an elderly client who typically cared for their mom on the weekends. The children planned to take their families to the beach for the weekend and needed an aide to care for their mother. The aide who typically cared for this patient as a live-in on weekdays was not available to fulfill this request. A different aide named Mia was available to pick up the shift, beginning Friday

morning and ending Sunday night. Because this is the first time Mia will be at the client's home, Regina, the nurse, was responsible for making a formal introduction between the aide and the client at the client's home. Alice said that this introduction gives the client and the client's family a sense of organizational responsibility and continuity since Regina created the client's care plan. Moreover, the client's daughter planned to meet the new aide at her mother's house, and having an aide to make the introduction was a good idea. Finally, the live-in aide currently working with the client has the responsibility of explaining the client's daily routines to the replacement aide, and showing the replacement aide around the house. The following story (edited down) is taken from my field notes. I was able to capture the back-and-forth telephone conversations because Alice was on speakerphone and I was in front of my computer typing the conversation:

Regina went to meet Mia at the [client's] house at 10:00 AM. By 10:15 AM, Regina called the office to say that she had not seen Mia and Mia had not picked up her phone when Regina tried calling her. At 10:30 AM, Mia called the office saying she is on her way. At 12:00 PM, Regina called Alice to say that Mia still has not arrived. Regina went on to say that the client's daughter needed to take her father to an appointment and can't stay around the house too much longer. The client's daughter had hoped to meet the new aide prior to going on her weekend trip, and so the timing was critical here to make the introduction prior to the daughter leaving for the weekend. Alice called Mia to see if she could be more exact with the time she will arrive at the client's home. But after repeated phone calls, Alice can't get ahold of Mia: "Of course now she's not picking up her phone. Who calls saying they're on their way and then two hours later, they're still not there?!"

Alice calls Regina back to let her know she can't get ahold of Mia, but that she should wait there a little bit longer. During Alice's conversation with Regina, Mia calls the office. Alice tells Regina that Mia's calling, and places Regina on hold. Alice gets on the phone and it sounds like Mia is saying that she's at the house, but that nobody's home. Alice asks the aide to describe the house, and Alice says: "it sounds like it's the right house." Alice then tells the aide she's going to put her on hold. She gets Regina back on the phone and asks Regina if she sees Mia outside. Regina does not see her. Alice gets a little stern and says, "Mia says she's there standing in the driveway, but you don't see her? Okay, hold on." Alice looks back to the other line and she no longer has Mia on hold. "Great, she hung up." Alice gets back on the phone with Regina. Regina asks: "Is she at the right house? I don't see a car or anyone in the driveway." Alice replies, "Okay, let me try and get ahold of Mia again and I'll call you back."

Alice hangs the phone up and says aloud, "What the heck is going on?!" She tries calling the aide, and "Now she's not answering the phone."

The new receptionist, Roseanne, chimes in: "It's always comical in here." At this point, Alice who was trying to keep her emotions under control is now fully irritated: "Is this some sort of game?!"

Alice calls Regina back and lets her know she can't get the aide on the phone.

Alice: "She's telling me she's standing in front of the house."

Regina: "I'm in the driveway, there's no one here."

Alice: "She's telling me she's there."

Regina: "I don't know what to tell you, she's not here."

Mia then calls the office and says that she is at the house. Alice asks her if she's in Sweet Leaf or Sweet Palms [two nearby towns which sound similar and have several streets with the same names]. The aide says she's in Sweet Palms. Alice says, "That's the problem, it should be Sweet Leaf!" Alice then looks up the address online in Sweet Palms that Mia is at and finds that it's very close by and that it just happens the same street name is located in both towns and the houses happen to look similar. "Ohhhhhhhh. Listen, stay right there and I'm coming to get you. Just wait there." She gets off the phone with the aide and mutters to the room, "I can't, I just can't [deal] anymore. She can't move. I'm not going to send her to the house. I'm just going to get her."

Alice calls Regina back: "I can't have her move one more time and have a problem. I'm going to pick her up."

Regina: "So you want me to stay here?"

Alice: "Yes, I want this over with."

Regina: "But the client is heading out the door."

Alice: "Let her go, it's not her issue."

Regina: "But now the other aides' shift is over and she wants to go leave."

Alice: "Tell her to take a chill pill. She needs to train Mia for like an hour. Nicole [The live in aide] has been there for five months. She can stay for two more hours. She [Nicole] doesn't have to be there for the changeover when the client comes back from his appointment or whatever. So just tell Nicole to wait."

Regina: "Okaaaaay." Drawing up the "ay" part suggesting that she is a little uncomfortable giving this sort of direction to Nicole. Alice then leaves the office to drive over to get Mia and direct her to the client's house.

...

About 20 minutes later the front door to the office opens. Alice comes in and Roseanne asks, "Did you get her?" And Alice responds: "Yup, she's right here." I was totally confused by this because I thought Alice was bringing Mia over to the client's house where both Regina and Nicole were waiting. Alice then sat down at Jenn's desk (who had left to pick up some other aide and drive her to a new client). I left the conference room and sat back down at my desk so I could continue listening to this story.

Suddenly, what seemed to come completely out of nowhere, Alice said to the aide in a stern, but calm and quiet voice: "This is illegal. Do you know that?" Alice then went on to ask: "Who are you, because I don't think you're Mia. The woman said, 'I'm Mia.'" Alice asked, "If I call Mia's phone, will it ring in your purse?" The woman said that she left her phone in her car. Alice then asked her to see her ID. And the woman said that she left her wallet in the car. (Alice later told us that when she asked her about her ID, she clenched onto her purse hard.) Alice got up from behind the desk and walked to the open conference room, turned to the aide and said, "Come here." I assumed that she wanted to continue this conversation with more privacy, although Roseanne and myself were the only ones in the office, so it did not seem necessary. When the woman got into the conference room, Alice turned to her and said, "I know that you're not Mia, so who are you?"

The woman finally said that she was Mia's friend. That she's a nursing student and that Mia couldn't do the job so she asked her to fill in for her. Standing in the conference room with the door open, Alice continued: "Do you know how illegal and wrong this is? Okay, get out of my office." As the woman was walking away, she said, "And you can tell Mia that I will be reporting her to the Board of Nurses and that she will likely be losing her license." The woman then abruptly left and closed the door behind her.

Alice then turned to Roseanne and me and filled us in on the punch line we now all knew: "That wasn't Mia." Alice then told us what transpired while she was out: Alice arrived at the house in Sweet Palms and when she got there, she knew the woman didn't look like Mia, although it had been several months since Alice saw Mia. Alice asked if she was Mia, and the woman said, "Yes." And Alice said, "You don't look like Mia." And the woman said, "I've gained a lot of weight." Alice said, "But you also don't sound like Mia." And the woman didn't reply. Alice then told us, "I know what Mia looks like. I hired her. And it's a good thing because Regina's never met her, so she doesn't know what Mia looks like."

Alice said she had the woman follow her back to the office in her own car. Roseanne asked how Alice convinced her to come back to the office and Alice said that she told the woman they just needed to stop by to pick something up before she showed her where the client's house was. The distance between the incorrect house that the Mia imposter was waiting at and the office was just a few miles apart.

Roseanne: "Well, she probably thought it wasn't really that wrong."

Alice: "It doesn't matter. It's illegal. That's fraud."

Roseanne: "Yeah, but they probably didn't think about it like that."

Alice: "Right. Now I've got to call the Board of Nurses and report this. She's going to lose her license. Why would she do that and jeopardize her license? She had it good."

Alice: A few moments later, "All that is right and holy. We finally went off the deep end. At least I knew what [Mia] looks like."

Roseanne: "I bet this happens in the industry all the time."

Alice: "It actually happened here another time."

(I later found out that the office hired a woman who was impersonating her sister, who was a certified home health aide. The woman herself had no home health aide training, but had worked for six years as a home health aide at another organization.)

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Now the office was in the situation of needing to find a replacement for Mia for a three-day overnight to start immediately. Jenn just came back to the office once Alice finished the story, and Roseanne very briefly explained the situation to Jenn. Alice and Jenn began working together to review the current aides' schedules to try to find a replacement. During this time, Regina remained at the client's house and relieved Nicole, since now it was the afternoon and the aide had to pick up her child from school. Alice and Jenn quickly realized they did not have any reliable aides who had three full days open that weekend, so they were forced to break up the overnights into different twelve hour shifts. Alice took the responsibility of calling Roberta, a relatively new hire, but someone very reliable who had already filled in several times: "Hi Roberta. I have my next problem." Roberta committed to working a few twelve hours shifts. Then Alice said to all of use in the office: "God bless the child that shows up and is polite. We'll ruin her within 6 months."

While Alice was speaking with Roberta, Jenn sent out several texts to aides to determine who might be available. After speaking with a number of different aides, Jenn and Alice were able to break up the three overnights with people they felt were highly reliable. However, Alice vented that this job will actually be costing her money. The price she pays a home health aide for hourly shifts is more than she pays for overnight shifts. However, Alice already committed the client to paying overnight shifts, and Alice knew that all she could do was to find aides to fill the hours for the sake of the office's reputation as well as to fulfill a general obligation to help someone needing care.

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Although Alice and Jenn successfully found replacements for this patient for the weekend, Jenn made many comments over the course of the day suggesting that they

were doing a disservice to the client. “Four different aides in two days for a guy with dementia... That’s another client we’re screwing around with.”

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In an attempt to make a policy that same day, Alice said, “From now on, we’re going to have every live-in come here first. I will not have them go directly to the home. We will train them here.”

In this crisis situation, a lot was at stake. First, if Alice did not catch the Mia impersonator before she started working with the client, the organization would have a critical issue on their hands if the client’s family found out that this person was not trained as a home health aide and did not work for ElderCare. Alice’s biggest fear, that her face would be on television because of something terrible an employee did, could have been realized. This is a rather provocative and juicy story that could find its way onto the 6 o’clock news. The whole story could have gone down hill quickly if anything did happen to the elderly client while the imposter was caring for her, whether it was from negligent care or from natural causes.

Second, the organization made a promise to a long-term client to secure an aide. The family of the client was planning to leave for their long weekend at any moment and ElderCare needed to find a replacement quickly if they wanted to retain this client for future work, retain a quality reputation, and avoid any negative backlash from this client’s family, since referrals is the primary generator of new business.

Third, while the crisis with Mia was resolved, Alice wanted to avoid, to the best of her ability, another crisis over the weekend with an aide not showing up for her shift or not being able to properly handle a dementia patient. While there were many aides available over the weekend to fill 12 hour slots, Alice and Jenn narrowed their search to those aides whom they knew had extensive experience managing dementia patients—not

all aides have this experience, nor have the patience to deal with the difficulties of a client with dementia. In addition, Alice also wanted to guarantee the best she could that the aides she selected to help the client would also work well with other aides. Each aide would have to discuss what they did during their shift with the incoming aides, and it was certainly the case that some aides would get angry if a replacement did not arrive promptly for their shift, or threaten the leave before the replacement aide arrived.

I suggest that because of the collaborative operations established in the organization, Regina, Jenn, and Alice effectively worked together to both placate the client and her family while they waited for a replacement aide, removed an imposter from potentially harming a client, fired and reported to the nursing board an aide that violated proper home health aide protocol, and instituted a new policy to prevent attempts at fraud again in the future.

Summary of ElderCare Routine Crisis Performance

Just as in the case of AeroGears, the corrective action required to remedy this crisis was costly to the organization in terms of both time and money. This incident took nearly three hours of work by Alice, about an hour of work by Jenn, and five hours of work by the nurse, who essentially sat in the client's house for much of the day. Monetary costs included these lost hours of work as well as the extra expenses of fulfilling a weekend overnight job with hourly shift workers. In regards to the home health aides' perspective, although the fill-in aides may have appreciated having the opportunity to make extra money, Alice knew that they would prefer to be notified at least several days in advance to fill an open slot—thus, there is potential that some of the

aides could have questioned the operation that Alice is running or harbor some negative sentiments towards the organization and its last minute requests. In addition, when Alice and Jenn asked aides to fill in over the weekend, they posed the opportunity as “a favor.” In fact, Jenn explicitly asked two aides if they could “do a favor for me.” When they agreed to fill in for the weekend, Jenn said at the end of the conversation, “I owe you one!” This sort of reciprocity would be best saved for a business opportunity that would help to advance the organization in terms of status or money, rather than to save the company from looking bad.

Alice’s shades of gray logic became more exacting in this crisis situation. Alice altered her typical equivocal logic, making a number of definitive moves to quell the crisis. Although Alice typically looked for input from other staff members prior to making decisions, evidenced in the routine business performance, her decisive leadership and decision-making process in this crisis did not alienate the other top managers. All organizational leaders worked in collaboration with Alice to successfully reach a resolution. Not only had Alice made immediate, absolute decisions about what to do during the crisis, but she also instituted a new organizational policy to avoid future fraud crises by training live-in replacements in the office. Through this policy, all the staff should come to know the aides better, helping to avoid the potential for an imposter slipping through the cracks. In fact, this new policy was instituted and became a requirement for all live-in replacement aides, at least for the duration of the time I was collecting data.

Thorny Rose

Primary Goal: *Beautiful arrangements*

Biggest Fear: Nicholas - “We do whatever we need to do. We don’t want a negative Yelp review.”

Performance: Asserting control and following the leader

Critical Components:

1. The four siblings who make up the primary workforce at Thorny Rose engage in daily verbal battles, criticizing each other endlessly. However, arguments are not isolated to siblings only—nonfamily staff are also chastised if it is believed that their work is inadequate.

2. However, during times of organizational stress, angry critiques are mitigated, and mistakes seem to be forgiven.

3. This transition away from disputes and to appeasement becomes more exaggerated during crisis events. Not only does criticism cease, even if one sibling is clearly responsible for a crisis, but siblings effectively collaborate to end crises.

4. This cooperative approach to crisis situations is made possible by the siblings and nonfamily employees seeing Julian, the oldest siblings, as the leader and viewing themselves as subordinates—elevating Julian’s social status among the group while lowering their own.

5. Despite this effective coordinated action, once the crisis is abated, the routine business performance quickly takes hold, preventing individual or organizational learning from taking place.

The Meaning of “XX” – How I Almost Ruined a Relationship on Valentine’s Day

The routine business operations at the Thorny Rose emphasized siblings’ ability to handle all aspects of the business with a focus on providing optimal customer service. This focus on customer satisfaction was effective in helping to avoid the organization’s biggest fear—that of getting a bad Yelp review, or any negative online reviews that retail customers of all types have come to rely on when making purchases from local, non-chain small businesses. As described in the previous chapter, the process of teaching siblings all business aspects was conducted through a “sink or swim” method, followed with critiques. Critiques often became criticisms related to specific aspects of business activities or differences of opinion. Expectations of what each sibling deemed appropriate led to near continuous daily arguments that sometimes made it difficult for the Thorny

Rose to retain non-family employees and even part-time seasonal employees. However, during stressful events, the siblings seemed to alter their routine business performance and “softened up a bit” (as I wrote several times in my field notes). The emphasis on each sibling’s competency to handle all aspects of the business remained, and their attention to customer service was consistently strong during times of stress. Nevertheless, their criticisms of each other were subdued.

In the following story, it is clear that siblings’ responses to my inappropriate actions are mitigated during stressful situations. In these events, in which I seemed to have almost ruined a customer’s relationship on Valentine’s Day and caused a monetary loss for the florist, all siblings responded in joking and nurturing ways to my mistake, rather than with criticism that I had come to expect and that I experienced in the past.

After working several very long days for the store’s biggest (and most stressful) sales day of the year, Valentine’s Day, I took a break on February 15th. As soon as I stepped in the shop on the morning of the 16th, Julian stopped me and asked me if I remember taking an order from a customer on Valentine’s Day who wanted orange tulips. The customer asked for the arrangement to be left outside of his girlfriend’s home. I said that I do remember the guy because I was on the phone with him for a while getting all his specific directions of which back porch was his girlfriend’s (she lived in a townhome complex with shared porches). Julian said that the customer called back yesterday. At the start of the conversation, the customer said he was very upset. He said that we had almost ruined Valentine’s Day and “perhaps damaged their relationship.” But Julian told me the customer said this all calmly and even apologized in advance if he sounded angry. The following continues from my field notes:

According to Julian, the customer said that the person who helped him on the phone (which was me), was “a really nice and helpful guy.” But this guy “severely messed up the order.” Julian luckily was able to quickly find this order among the hundred or so deliveries made the previous day, and saw on the order sheet that I had written lots of explicit directions about what flowers the customer wanted (a dozen orange tulips, the richer in color the better, without baby’s breath or other fillers) and where to leave them if no one was home (on the back porch, which required going up the steps along the left side of the house, the girlfriend’s apartment was the second door on the right). Julian couldn’t imagine how the order was messed up given these details.

After listening to the customer vent for a bit, the customer finally said that the pre-printed phrase at the top of the card that was included with the flowers were the words “I love you”—one of several generic cards that we included with Valentine’s Day

bouquets. He said that he had only been dating this girl for three months and he hadn't said "I love you" yet to her. The line that Julian told me he really loved from this customer was when he said, "Hoooooow daaaaaare he" give that card. Apparently the guy said the "Hoooooow daaaaaare he" line three or four more times. The customer said that I "had no right to give that card." Although Julian was not told exactly what happened on Valentine's Day between the couple, I think it is safe to assume that the night started off a bit rough as a result of the card—having to explain to someone that your feelings for them are strong, but not quite as strong as might have been suggested on a pre-printed phrase on a card can be a difficult conversation in a budding relationship; especially on the supposed most romantic day of the year.

Julian told the customer that to make up for the mistake he could send out a follow up bouquet of orange or yellow roses with a balloon that says, "I'm thinking of you" to make it "less mushy." Julian told me that he asked the customer what he would like us to do "to make it up to him." And Julian told me the guy said that he's "too upset now to decide now," but that he'll get back to us. Julian told the guy that it was so busy at the store on Valentine's Day and so many orders came in that I likely just grabbed any card that was close. The customer said again that I sounded like a nice guy and he didn't want me to get fired for the mistake (as if that would happen), but that he "was very upset about the whole thing." So Julian said that we'll have his name on record and that he can call back within the next few weeks and we'll send a bouquet of similar value, free of charge, for the mistake.

Julian showed me the order form that I wrote up to see if I knew why I selected an "I love you" card, since there were plenty of cards I could have selected. In addition to five cards with the phrase "I love you," each with images of different flowers or designs on them, there was also a card that simply said, "Happy Valentine's Day" and one generic, blank card with some roses on it. I looked back at the order form and saw that in the message section I wrote 'XX, Alex.' I remembered that the customer explicitly told me to write 'XX,' which I thought was cute. But I also remember interpreting 'XX' as love. Obviously that was not his interpretation! He clearly wanted me to write 'XX' because he did not want it signed "love."

...

I apologized to Julian, but he did not seem upset at all about it. And while he retold the story, el diablo blanco was nearby making an arrangement and laughing periodically.

Perhaps the client's own tame anger with the mistake also tempered concern for the organization's biggest fear of a bad review. Given the stress of the lead-up to Valentine's Day, and the intensity of non-stop work on Valentine's Day itself, it appears that mistakes like the one I made were given a pass. There were also no comments about this mistake being some sort of "lesson learned," discussion I received in the past when I made a mistake.

Moreover, I was not the only one to make a mistake on Valentine's Day. Tyler gave one customer a discount on a floral arrangement because he was a regular customer. A non-regular customer who overheard the discount offered asked for a discount as well, but she denied it to him. As a result, the customer got angry and left the store without making a purchase. When Tyler told this story to her siblings, they simply told her not to worry about it—although when Tyler had done the exact same thing on a non-holiday, Nicholas chastised her about giving discounts to customers on the spot, rather than telling them that they could get a discount the next time they came to make a purchase.

It seems that Julian's primary motivation to bring the issue to my attention was because it was a funny story to share. Exceptions during stressful times demonstrated a contrast to the relationship dynamics at the Thorny Rose during routine business operations. Times of crises, as demonstrated in the next section require even greater changes in relational dynamics, transformed through leadership direction and collaborative work.

“Where Are My Centerpieces?!”: A Sweet Sixteen Crisis

The following story demonstrates the way that relationships among siblings are altered during a crisis to both ameliorate the immediate situation while accomplishing the organization's ostensive goals.

“I'm sorry ma'am. I do remember you coming in here, but I don't see your order.” We all stood around Julian while he attempted to calm down a somewhat frantic mother on the phone who claimed that her balloon and flower centerpiece order for her daughter's sweet sixteen party had not yet arrived. Guests were expected at any moment. “You said you have your order receipt with you? Why don't you read that to me and we'll make your order right now and speed it over to you.” From the raised voice on the other end of the phone, it seemed that this did not quite satisfy the party-planning mother. Again, Josh apologized and was attempting to work multiple angles with this customer—

get her order, get off the phone so he could fulfill the order, and appease her so that in the end she would somehow leave the experience with a positive feeling. “Yes ma’am. I promise I can make this quickly and beautiful for you, and we will give you this order free of charge. So when you get the chance to stop by the store, we will reimburse you. I do apologize for this.”

Josh got off the phone and he immediately began directing the five of us, Nicholas, Tyler, the Kid, Driver Jules (one delivery guy’s name is also Julian—to distinguish him from the siblings, they added the title ‘Driver’ to his name), and myself, on which balloons to inflate, which string color to tie to the balloons, which flowers were needed for the bouquets, and which van to prep for delivery. The order included eight tabletop balloon arrangements and three floral arrangements (which were each fairly large, but not complex to construct). Nicholas was apologizing to all of us during this frenetic, yet efficient process. Nicholas had taken the order for the sweet sixteen two weeks ago and had confirmed the order with the customer just yesterday. Yet, the order was not found in today’s outbox. Julian told the client that for us to expedite the arrangements to get it to the venue quickly, we would be making some slight variations to the original order, but we would be sure the color scheme was accurate. Julian emphasized that we wanted to be sure they got to the party before the guests moved into the main event space where the centerpieces and floral arrangement were to be positioned. Luckily, the order was small, we had all the balloons and flowers the customer requested, and the location of the party was nearby.

I was responsible for balloon blowing via the helium tank and tying strings to the end of the balloons to eventually organize them together on a colorful cellophane-wrapped weight—luckily I had experience with balloon centerpieces the previous week, which had taken me some time to learn to get the balloons to look fully inflated without popping. I was also familiar with the balloon filing system. Balloons for many occasions were kept in stock—baby girl births, communions, retirement, graduations, sweet sixteen, etc.—in addition to a large collection of colored balloons, organized alphabetically by color. I was also familiar with where they kept a shipment of balloons that had not yet been sorted and filed. Between the balloon collections in the file cabinet and the jumbled box of unorganized balloons, I was able to find the balloons that Julian requested. While I inflated these balloons on one helium tank, the Kid inflated balloons on the other tank—clearly working faster than me with his years of balloon-blowing experience. Across from me, Tyler, Nicholas, and Julian worked on arrangements. All floral arrangements were to look the same, and so each designer kept glancing at the others’ arrangements, making adjustments to their own, until they all looked interchangeable. Driver Jules had pulled the van up next to the greenhouse and cleared out some debris from it to ready it for loading, before darting back into the shop and jumping on a computer to look up directions to the venue.

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After about 20 minutes, everything was set. We put large plastic garbage bags over the balloon centerpieces to keep them contained and provide an extra, albeit thin, layer of protection from the van ceiling and other elements that may pierce the balloons. Nicholas and Driver Jules rearranged the wooden boards in the van that were used to

support vases during transport to best accommodate the three large floral arrangements. And then we all carefully brought out the balloons and flowers to the van. Nicholas joined Driver Jules in the delivery van, and the two sped off to the sweet sixteen party.

Once the van took off and the rest of us went back into the shop, I noticed Tyler had a big smile on her face. I asked her what she was so pleased about and she said, “It’s amazing how quickly we were able to get that together. Imagine if we worked that well together all the time. We could get so much done!” And then she followed up with, “but that will never happen.” And laughed.

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When Nicholas and Driver Jules returned about 30 minutes later, they seemed very pleased with themselves. They confirmed that they arrived just at the end of the “mocktail hour” (remember the event was for a sixteenth birthday party), which was held in a room different from where the balloons and flowers were to go. They were able to sneak in the arrangements before any of the guests could notice. Nicholas went on to add that when he spoke with the customer at the event during the delivery process, she seemed pleased with the floral and balloon arrangements and was appreciative of the quick delivery. He went on to say that he may have “even talked her into giving us a good Yelp review.”

The party-planning mother’s order form was found the next day, paper-clipped to another order. After a brief “investigation” by way of a short discussion between Julian and Nicholas, concluded that Nicholas had accidentally paper clipped the two orders together. Both orders were taken by Nicholas, but he accidentally assumed that the two separate order forms were part of the same order. He likely failed to double check the information on each order, which would have made it clear that it was for separate customers.

This was not the first time that a customer’s order was misplaced. It was not the only time that Nicholas or Julian chose to forfeit a payment in hopes of appeasing a client in an effort to retain the florists’ customer service reputation and avoid its biggest fear. This was also not a perfect storm of events aligning together in a rare occurrence. Such mistakes of forgotten orders, missed order deadlines, or incorrect orders regularly happened. Nicholas should have immediately placed the order in its appropriate bin once

he took the order, and if he forgot, someone should have noticed the order outside its bin. The order should have been given special attention after the customer called to confirm delivery. However, because Nicholas had originally taken the order from the customer, and was the one who confirmed the order the day before, he assumed that everything was in place. I have seen him act in similar ways before—where he made assumptions about orders and failed to check up on the proper paperwork and routine confirmation to ensure these sorts of situations would not occur.

Summary of Thorny Rose Routine Crisis Performance

Because all the employees at the Thorny Rose, including myself, have had some experience in all parts of the shop's operations, we were each able to immediately assist with some aspect of the emergency order. Julian instructed each of us to complete some activity to expedite the order, and each of us followed his instructions without question. None of the other siblings gave any input into what anyone should do. Each appeared to adjust down their social status, assuming subordinate positions, while elevating Julian's position as the leader of the group—in a way, it seemed that Julian was finally given the authority and respect by his siblings that he deserved as the Thorny Rose's leader. But as the reader might imagine, this respect dissipated immediately after the crisis was abated. While Nicholas and Driver Jules were out on delivery, Tyler said she wanted to take a quick break. Julian said she should first finish a bouquet to ready for delivery when Drive Jules comes back, but Tyler said that she would just do it after her break. And she walked out the front door of the shop.

Although the Thorny Rose is often filled with ongoing tit-for-tat conversations, blame, and disagreements about everything from how someone interacted with a

customer to which flowers to use for a small \$45 arrangement, the family members seamlessly organized around this crisis. There was no blame directed towards Nicholas, neither on the day of the emergency nor after the event when an “investigation” determined that he made multiple errors that resulted in this crisis. I was anticipating that the other shoe would drop at any moment, and that Nicholas would have to take the wrath of one of the siblings, chiding him about his failure of responsibility for this \$400 monetary loss. However, such blaming never materialized. It seemed that in this emergency, not only did the members perform a coordination of activities to get the work itself accomplished in an unusually timely manner, but they also organized their sentiments about this event around the desire to help each other and the Thorny Rose. This performance of work roles and relational emotions around this crisis was effective in helping expedite the work required to complete the immediate task, as well as to enable necessary work activities to take place throughout the rest of the work day without any energy being expended on anger. However, while the responsible party admitted fault for the misplaced order, there were no changes in policy or practices, and no individual consequences. It seemed that because the different organizational members seemed to put the issue to rest immediately after it occurred, there was no opportunity to evaluate how this issue could be avoided in the future.

Routine Crisis Performance Conclusion

Like the routine business performance, generating organizational order during times of elevated stress or crisis to accomplish ostensive goals was enabled by each organization’s idioculture. The shared values, meanings of actions, collective histories

and references among small groups provide actors with common understandings of how to relate to one another when firm operations were no longer calm. The alternative performances during stressful organizational activity and more critical firm crises that suggested pending organizational failures required an adjustment of relationships among small group members and associated meanings of their activities. But this alternative importantly needed to be understood as a legitimate way of operating in order for the group to remain cohesive. Ongoing interactions and negotiated orders enable firm actors to come to a shared understanding of appropriate relations during routine crisis performance. As described above, while most small groups were successful at creating a group performance that they found to be legitimate, leading to collaborative crisis management, this was not the case in all firms.

Actors in two of the small groups related to each other differently during times of even modest increases in stress. At Rolling Hills, Penelope restructured her designation of harvesting responsibilities on Mondays, prior to the crisis CSA Tuesdays, and assigned what she believed to be important produce collecting responsibilities to those with the most experience, rather than asking for suggestions from the farmhands themselves about the tasks they would like to complete. Penelope increasingly assumed the role of boss, rather than mother, as her anxiety increased at the start of each week, creating initial rifts between herself and farmhands. In contrast, during times of organizational stress at the Thorny Rose, leaders and subordinates band together. Rather than the aggressive, combative relationships that came to define the interactions between siblings (and occasionally between non-sibling staff and siblings [almost exclusively with the hot-headed Nicholas]), stressful situations seemed to mellow the possibility of confrontations.

Not only was I not chastised for my improper interpretation of ‘XX’ (this was actually one of only two complaints about Valentine’s Day deliveries—and I only took a few orders, so my error rate was rather high compared to other family and non-family workers), but Tyler’s mistake (allowing a one-time customer to overhear a discount she was giving to a regular customer) was also not criticized. Both of these mistakes would receive censure from at least one other sibling if they occurred during times of calm.

The differences in performances between times of calm and stress were less obvious at AeroGears and ElderCare. As noted, both these organizations’ operations during times of calm were mired by daily stress—stress that I personally experienced as well when I worked at those organizations. Situations that elevate stress further did not constitute a change in performance. At AeroGears, disorganization and limited information on completing tasks contributed to a constantly stressful environment, making the completion of routine tasks a challenge. The additional responsibilities of ensuring aerospace paperwork was accurate added an additional layer of stress onto an already edgy workplace. And at ElderCare, determining appropriate matches between home health aides and elderly clients to prevent the low quality care (from aides whose skills or personalities were poor matches for clients) and the threat of abandoned clients (from aides who did not show up) was critical not only to organizational survival, but also to the physical survival of its elderly clients.

Nevertheless, a clear alternative performance is evident during crisis situations at all four organizations, although the performances varied. In the organizational responses, I found examples of deference to authority (Hermann 1963), equalitarian group-oriented behavior (Lanzetta 1955), and increased-receptivity by leaders (Driskell and Salas 1991).

In addition, some organizations experienced increased conflict (Hamblin 1958), while in others hostility decreased (Lanzetta 1955). At Rolling Hills, Penelope responded to crisis with greater oversight, while farmhands sought to simply appease her anxiety while harboring resentments about her alternative actions from that of the holistic job performance. At AeroGears, rather than managers sticking to their tasks, Jack and Alex shared their perspectives on how to handle the uncertainty of a crisis response—although the final decision to act excluded Alex. At ElderCare, Alice shed her shades of gray logic and took definitive action to ameliorate that day’s issue of fraud, and dictated how the organization should handle the rest of the weekend for the “abandoned” client. In turn, the ElderCare staff supported her decisions by dealing with the client and the client’s family, and securing replacement aides for the weekend. Finally, in an organization that seemed to lack a respected leader, Julian not only asserted control over the crisis situation at Thorny Rose, but his siblings respected Julian’s directions without resistance and criticism, nor input or suggestions. Instead, everyone followed the leader without question.

What could explain the varied responses during times of crisis? I suggest that organizational idiocultures help us understand the similarities and the differences in the stress and crisis performances between these four organizations.

At Rolling Hills, farmhands believed that CSA members were not concerned about receiving produce that was slightly soiled, damaged, or even had a few bugs in them. Members did not voice any complaints about the collections they received each week, and several explicitly said that they expected the produce’s imperfections because it was organic and local (suggesting that imperfections were part of the trade-off for high

quality, high nutrition produce). Nevertheless, Penelope's weekly concern for putting out pristine produce lead her to greater oversight of volunteers, abandoning the holistic performance of the routine business culture that she seemed to have both practical and philosophical reasons to invest in. However, for a crisis to exist for a group as an urgent situation all group members must face a common threat (Hamblin 1958:322) or individuals must judge that something is at stake (Lazarus 1966). A disparity existed between Penelope and the farmhands. While Penelope believed that weekly CSA preparation crises required her to assume greater oversight, farmhands did not think weekly CSA preparation constituted a crisis. Thus, the small group response can be regarded as a deference to authority, accompanied by an increase in conflict—although farmhands tried to placate Penelope's demands in order to mitigate her anxiety and avoid conflict, the repressed resentments sometimes overflowed, erupting in verbal clashes between Penelope and farmhands. Simultaneously, this crisis was also characterized by equalitarian group behavior, where Penelope both solicited the opinions of her “most trusted” farmhands to provide insight in the visual display of her produce and quantity of produce that should be offered to CSA members. Overarching theories of crisis responses in groups would not be able to predict such mixed responses. Without understanding the small group's history, shared references and experiences, we would not be able to understand why such conflict would exist on what seems to be a peaceful, organic farm, where volunteers come freely to work the land and learn about themselves.

Rather than sticking to their own task, AeroGears management actively sought advice from one another. Jack saw the traceability issue as a crisis only after Alex voluntarily brought it to Jack's attention. Given Jack's tight grip on the organization and

his inability to integrate new hires into AeroGears as loyal employees, it is logical that Alex's perspective on the issue rests with his own personal integrity, rather than a dedication to the organization per se. Moreover, while Jack and Alex debated about the issue for much of the day, the final decision to resolve the crisis was made by Jack and Leo, without Alex's presence. Despite the gravity of the situation, Alex was still committed to leaving at 5 o'clock, even if Leo was not yet back at the office from his all day meeting. Moreover, Leo or Jack could have telephoned Alex at home while they made the final decision—but they did not. Just as they had typically done during routine business operations, they continued to perform as the ultimate decision makers of the organization and refused to relinquish any control to other key leaders, even in times of crisis. AeroGears' routine crisis performance could be seen as leaning towards increased reciprocity, where conflict decreases, social distance decreases, and opinions are solicited, but subordinates prefer deference to leaders.

At ElderCare, we see how an already cooperative small group effectively worked together to resolve an immediate crisis. Although, rather than operating as full collaborators, as they usually do, Alice took control of all the critical decisions that day, centralizing authority while other top managers deferred to her authority. She neither asked for opinions, nor did anyone provide them voluntarily. Although there were minor slights about these actions, for example a few comments Jenn made about the disservice they are doing for the client by having him work with several new aides in such a short time span, this did not seem like a rebuff of Alice's actions and more of a lamentation. The staff in turn supported all of Alice's decisions and helped resolve the crisis. I would argue that because of the highly collective routine business operations established at

ElderCare, neither the nurse nor the administrator took offense to Alice's performance of taking a decisive role (unlike at Rolling Hills where increased authority centralization resulted in resentment and heightened conflict).

Finally, at the Thorny Rose, opinions were neither solicited nor given freely during the organizational crisis. Here, we see a centralization of authority, and one where conflict decreased. Although Julian should have arguably been the clear organizational leader, he did not have authority over his siblings during routine business operations. However, during the organizational crisis, he asserted his control and everyone followed his lead. Julian has been the family's problem solver, *de facto* father figure, and self-sacrificer for years. I believe that at this time of organizational crisis, the role that Julian assumed during his family's personal affairs translated into organizational operations—and in this context, he became the problem-solving, self-sacrificing father that is respected and followed. Only by understanding the rich and layered history and values of these siblings and the small group culture they created and reinforced through their ongoing interactions, can we understand why the siblings performance during an organizational crisis was structured the way it was.

Aside from the cultural argument I've put forward, it can be suggested that some aspects of crisis response are a result of practical concerns. For example, leaders at both Thorny Rose and ElderCare may have taken definitive action because their crises were characterized by the need for an instantaneous response (i.e. the sweet sixteen event was happening at the moment of they received the customer's urgent call, and the dementia patient was at home with no home health aide). However, the responses from these leaders also requires organizational members to believe that a crisis was in fact occurring

(which was not the case at Rolling Hills), and that taking unequivocal direction from a leader was a legitimate performance in this context (something that was also acceptable by Alex at AeroGears, even though it is within his job description to make a final judgment on accepting or rejecting parts).

It could have been the case that ElderCare staff suggested that Alice simply apologize to the client that the aide they scheduled cancelled and they could not find a replacement. After all, the client's family made their plans last minute, so why should they expect ElderCare to find a quality replacement so quickly? Another alternative could be that ElderCare finds coverage for Friday and Saturday, but not Sunday—saving both money and a “favor” they would have to repay to an aide.

At the Thorny Rose, Julian's siblings could have suggested that they simply make extra, inexpensive balloon arrangements and forgo the floral arrangements, saving the organization money. Since the mistake was Nicholas's, the other siblings and staff (including myself) could have chosen not to help quickly complete the order, instead making a statement about the importance of not letting a simple order turn into an organizational crisis. However, individuals at both these organizations did not perform any of these alternative performances. Instead each group worked with the leader, albeit in slightly different ways, based on each firm's shared histories, references, and values, enacting a performance they all have come to embody as a legitimate way to respond to the crisis. They found the transformed status systems and newly negotiated orders to be appropriate. Group members understood what was needed to complete their organization's ostensive goals, and they transitioned to a routine crisis performance not

because a threat was immediate, but because of the shared group cultural meanings they created together.

The performance of routine crisis operations requires alternative relational interactions, resource allocation, and meaning creation from that of the routine business performance. Although some firms in my study contend with low-level stress as part of their daily operations, and thus are adept at handling high-level stressful situations, crises required all organizational leaders and employees (or volunteers) to work differently with each other. As described, these differences spanned from increased conflict to increased collaboration. Most of the firms in this study accepted centralization of authority, although some leaders sought opinions from other managers and subordinates in their organizations, while others gave precise directives of how to handle the crisis without soliciting suggestions. These routine crisis performances constitute variations of the routine business performance. Moreover, they reflect relations that developed over time, from shared experiences, values, constructions of social status, and other negotiated interactions that together, constitute an alternative and legitimate way to respond to crisis situations.

Chapter 7: Routine Growth Performance

Based on the stories and analysis presented so far, it should be clear to the reader that small business owners, managers, and employees are constantly engaged in managing and controlling business activities. Limited resources require most company personnel to assume multiple responsibilities and typically work at a fast pace, even during routine business operations. Coordinated changes in activities and relationships during routine crisis operations escalate the pace and stress of work, further taxing small business workers. Among these varied arrangements, organizations intermittently experience another important form of group activity: *a routine growth performance*.

Although all businesses start as small organizations, prior research on small firm growth remains sparse—in spite of the significance of small businesses in American popular culture and ideology, as well as the fact that the majority of American employees work in small businesses. Studies on the determinants of small business growth generally fall into four categories: organizational strategies (policies and plans for business development), characteristics of the entrepreneur (individual-level attributes), environment or industry specific factors (external constraints and opportunities), and characteristics of the firm (age and size) (see Dobbs and Hamilton 2007 for a review). This dissertation concentrates on small group cultures. Among these four categories influencing firm growth, an idioculture framework lends itself to a focus on the way firm actors work together to develop and implement organizational strategies. However, as other scholars suggest (O’Gorman 2001; Dobbs and Hamilton 2007), organizational growth is not constituted by a single factor. According to an idioculture framework, strategies, individual attributes and experiences, the external environment, and firm

characteristics all play a role in influencing the way that a small group operates, and in this case, pursues strategies for firm growth. Thus, I aim to account for a variety of factors that influence firm growth when analyzing group cultures.

During routine crisis performances, discussed in the previous chapter, I suggest that firms respond to stress and crisis based on their established organizational cultures (adjusting their resources and relationships to avoid the organization's biggest fear), without planning or preparation. These findings are consistent with the literature, which suggests that crisis planning receives little attention in organization research (whether large or small organizations) unless an actual crisis event occurs (Spillman and Hough 2003). Similarly, small firms typically do not develop any formal strategies to help them determine a path for growth (Robinson and Pearce 1983, 1984; Lyles et al. 1993). As a result, researchers suggest that many small firms do not realize their full growth potential (Scott and Rosa 1996). In a review of the literature on small firm strategic planning, Robinson and Pearce (1984) identified four primary reasons for the lack of formal strategic planning in small businesses: scarcity of time, little knowledge of the planning process to develop a formal strategy, lack of specialized knowledge often needed for planning, and a lack of trust and openness to share strategy ideas with employees or outside consultants.

Even though most small firms do not have any formal strategies in place, small business managers believe that formal planning (with the use of planning manuals, development of written company literature, schedules for implantation, etc.) is important to a firm's performance (Robinsons and Pearce 1984). Moreover, scholars providing prescriptive solutions to improve business performance often believe formal processes

are critical for small business success (Robinson and Pearce 1984). However, it should be evident from the research presented thus far that small businesses have few formal processes of any sort. Notwithstanding that fact, though, a lack of formal routines does not necessarily mean that small businesses do not plan for growth—it means that their strategies are non-formal, not written down, and not always shared with all employees. Instead, strategies for growth are often discussed informally among managers in meetings or during unplanned and casual conversations about the organization (Nordquist 2011) without written documentation. Even though it appears that management scholars, consultants, and small business owners themselves believe formal planning is important or even necessary for growth, some studies suggest that there is no significant difference in performance between firms that use formal versus non-formal strategies for growth (Lyles et al. 1994).

Rather than conceptualizing strategic planning as a single event or a static formal document, some researchers distinguish strategic planning from strategic processes (i.e. decisions that are made on an ongoing basis, rather than premeditated) (Fredrickson 1984, 1986). Some studies find that there is no significant relationship between formal strategic planning and the processes that organizations actually undertake (Robinson and Pearce 1983). On the other hand, other researchers find a direct relationship between formal planning and the amount of emphasis placed on each element of the decision process (Bracker et al. 1988), because previous formal planning calls attention to particular key strategic goals. In fact, formal planning may help some firms adopt a greater range of strategies that may provide better opportunities for business success (Lyles et al. 1994).

Most of the research on small business growth has emphasized formal versus informal planning, and strategic planning versus strategic processes. Such conceptual dichotomization typically derives from the ongoing perception that a small firm is a “little big business” (Welsh and White 1981). This assumption continues to be based on the notion that the “best practices” of large businesses translate to the operations of small firm activity. However, the lack of consensus among researchers about the optimal way in which small firms pursue growth suggest that there may be an alternative way to understanding firm growth strategies.

Rather than measuring levels of formality or distinguishing between planning and process, I continue to focus attention on the ways that small group cultures provide useful tools and meanings to enable coordination of business owners, managers, and employees in the pursuit of growth. What I found from this cultural framework is that growth in small businesses was not a continuous process, nor something that was planned or implemented with any specificity. Instead, a variety of different activities organized at efforts to grow occurred periodically. Just like during times of organizational stress and crises, times of growth result in both a change of resource allocation and relationships among firm actors. As can be imagined, these alternative ways of performing the firm’s ostensive goals, exclusively initiated by firm owners and top managers, resulted in adjustments to the meanings of work established during the routine business operations.

Growth and the Necessity to Unsettle Group Relations

Any adjustment away from a firm’s routine business performance alters the tacit agreements of work—the meanings and symbols created and recreated among small groups that enable coherent firm operations. However, for a small business to grow,

customs and traditions may no longer constitute the appropriate cultural tools for group relations. Activities that require growth, and their associated meanings, must change from the routine business operations. The way in which small groups come to understand new relations of meanings deemed necessary for firm growth is critical. As previous research suggests, top managers often have formal and informal conversations about growth strategies in most small firms with growth aspirations. But if discussions of growth are isolated to a few top level people of an organization as studies find, and the intentions, reasons, and meanings for growth are not circulated among organizational members, firm leaders may be setting themselves up for discordant behavior among employees.

While group cultures change over time as members incorporate usable aspects and beliefs from shared experiences into group work, this process happens collaboratively over time. However, when high status group members propose change (independent of shared events), and dictate growth intentions to employees, these directives may alienate group members. Although top leadership may maintain power and can influence actors who hold lower status positions, such reinforcement of status distinctions in small groups may not provide the sort of camaraderie and long term commitment most small groups require in order to reach organizational goals. When practices, activities, and decision-making patterns change without opportunity for negotiated interactions, and the traditional ways of meaning making in interaction no longer seem to operate, groups become less durable.

An important part of the potential decline of group cohesiveness is group identity. Social identity is created and perpetuated through ongoing meaning making in group interactions (Fine 2012). When negotiated interactions no longer provide group actors

with a work identity they consider viable, in that it does not provide them a source of motivation and sense of belonging, then they may look for a new source of identity. This new identity may come from a faction of the group looking to establish itself as a distinct entity (although one still bounded by the larger parameters of the group) or from an actor deciding to leave the group entirely to join another group (or firm, in this case).

Social Skill and Control Over Meaning Making

So how can small firms maintain order and stability while performing routine growth operations? Although we know that formal planning typically does not occur in small firms, it may be reasonable to suggest that firm leaders engage employees while strategies are in process, i.e. while growth activities are actively taking place. In order to successfully perpetuate group stability during times of growth, organizational leaders need to have the proper skills and enact the right tactics to persuade others to cooperate during activities that alter small groups' perceptions of appropriate interactions and associated meanings.

Fligstein (1997, 2001) uses the term “social skill” to define an actor’s ability to induce cooperation in others. Local social orders, or “fields” are created and reproduced by actors. The structural fields, in turn, provide rules and meanings that enable the understanding of appropriate, ongoing social interactions. Fligstein suggests that during times of uncertainty, institutional entrepreneurs (DiMaggio 1988)—those with ideas and visions for organizational change as well as the ability to engage others into action—can help establish new rules or patterns of interacting and even new identities for actors. When a field becomes destabilized, an institutional entrepreneur with high levels of

social skill can employ a variety of tactics towards the aim of changing the power dynamics of the field. Groups that once held few resources may become a power leader, and in turn, alter their sense of identity (Fligstein 2001).

Actors with social skills require knowledge of two social factors: the current condition of the organizing field and the groups within it, and the types of strategic action that makes sense given the conditions of the field (Fligstein 2001). Examples of the types of strategies available to actors include: direct authority, agenda setting, framing action, taking what the system gives you, brokering, maintaining ambiguity, aggregating interests, making other think they are in control, and networking to outliers who have no coalitions. (See Fligstein 1997 for a complete list and descriptions of each strategy.) Fields with no structure have the greatest possibility for strategic action. In settled fields the rules are clear and the role of powerful and less powerful actors are defined. Finally, with fields in crisis, powerful groups will try and reinforce their power. While Fligstein suggests these concepts are useful to help us understand large social institutional changes, such as those that take place through social movements, I believe social skill is also a concept applicable to small firm research.

The small businesses in this study evidently have structure—firm actors have relatively defined roles, and the general rules of interacting and operating are known. In such a field, “institutional entrepreneurs can turn into actors trying to maintain or fight the status quo” (Fligstein 1997:401). Those in power should do what is necessary to continue to convince others that it is in their interest to keep things going. In terms of tactics, often controlling the agenda, framing action to convince others it is in their interests, and using direct authority are enough to keep things going (Fligstein 2001).

During routine business performances, rules and patterns of relations are stable and mostly taken for granted. However, times of growth require new meaning creation because values and rules become unsettled. Organizational actors require new understandings for why things are being performed differently from times of routine business operations. While firm leaders can control the activities of employees through direct authority and other tactics, these strategies may not necessarily provide groups with common meanings to enable them to maintain a cohesive, orderly unit. While stable fields may have institutional entrepreneur challengers, in these small businesses, challengers were not interested in trying to capture organizational resources per se. Instead, challengers were poised to control the meaning of their work during unsettling times of growth.

Just like in routine crisis performances, I found that during times of growth, organizational actors reorganize their patterns of interactions, making adjustments in relationships and resources, developing an alternative performance aimed at firm growth. The decision to grow is not something that occurs spontaneously (even if growth opportunities arise sporadically) but it often unsettles the organization. However, unlike a routine crisis, growth does not constitute an organizational threat that bands firm actors together. Thus, institutional entrepreneurs implementing organizational growth strategies must recognize how growth can destabilize an organization, the importance of new meaning making to legitimize reasons for growth, and the significance of generating order around an alternative identity. Without the necessary empathetic social skills leaders must possess to recognize the need to solicit cooperation, or awareness of tactics to implement such changes, small group cultures may rupture.

What I found among the group of small businesses discussed in this dissertation is that none of the small business leaders seemed to exhibit high levels of social skill. They primarily employed direct authority and framing action to attempt to convince firm actors that growth was simply “necessary.” These tactics mostly induced employees to do the work required of them, but it did not necessarily persuade employees that the ways of operating and making decisions during routine growth performances were appropriate. Instead, challengers stirred resistance by persuading other organizational actors that the reasons for organizational growth were improper and failed to align with their sense of identity. By buttressing support for their contrasting perspectives, these challengers were able to maintain a sense of control they felt during routine business operations, as well as preserve an organizational identity that connected them to a faction of group members who came to share similar perspectives of firm growth. Although institutional entrepreneur challengers do not vie for power or resources directly (at least in the organizations in this study), resistance to leadership’s meaning making is evident, resulting in lower quality work, organizational conflict, and decisions of individual actors to leave the organization.

Strategies for Growth

Based on descriptions in my field notes and formal and informal interviews with firm employees, the phrases below constitute a generalized description of each organization’s long-term strategic goals. One caveat is that the Thorny Rose had two different strategic goals that were believed to constitute firm growth. Because both

strategies received equal attention in my field notes in interviews, and constituted a significant source of conflict, both are included below:

Rolling Hills: Growing into a full-service farm

ElderCare: Becoming the go-to home health aide service

AeroGears: Transitioning from a job shop to a world-class factory

Thorny Rose: Today's single rose may be tomorrow's 30K wedding and Leveraging our skill and brand beyond a basic flower shop

A significant influence on the long-term goals for each firm is the perception held by firm owners and managers of what constitutes a successful business. These perceptions were typically situated in beliefs about what a legitimate company in each industry "looks like." Notions of legitimacy serve as powerful forces that influence the growth performance of each business. Organizational leaders could point to specific firms in their industry that were symbolic of their intended growth efforts. But again, little planning was in place to provide explicit steps to enable each organization to reach the firm size or level of legitimacy that they strove for.

The general implementation of the strategic goals for growth in each small business in this study was rather simple: acquire new business by continuously making sales, and then react as quickly as possible to fulfill orders placed (or services scheduled). However, as could be deduced from such a generic execution of growth, the strategic performance of these goals were not enacted smoothly. Just as in the crisis performance, periodic times of growth can be characterized as reactive, rather than planned. Lack of planning sometimes resulted in financial losses (just as in times of routine crisis), because of an inability to properly shift resources to comply with clients' expectations. These strategic growth goals are, in all accounts, highly generalized with little short- or long-

term specificity of how the organization needs to shift or add resources to fulfill client demands.

The performance of each firm's strategy is described below. The following are succinct expressions representational of leaders' growth aspirations. Verbatim quotes are provided in the chapter during analysis of each field site. (Again, at the Thorny Rose I found two distinct growth performances corresponding to each firm strategy.)

Rolling Hills: Diversify options to existing clients

ElderCare: Get clients and fill jobs

AeroGears: Make as many pieces as possible and ship

Thorny Rose: Always be available for customers and Focus on big-ticket items

Despite intentions to grow, performances did not appear to be reasonably situated within broader organizational contexts—i.e. it seemed that the desire to reach some level of organizational growth was not positioned within the reality of the limited organizational resources each firm had to contend with. In order to diversify, get new clients, make as many pieces as possible, always be available or focus on big-ticket items, each firm typically needed additional human capital. However, limited financial capital restricted opportunities to bring on new or higher quality employees, and firm leaders resisted investing in new employees with uncertainty about continued financial flows. As a result, each firm tried to squeeze more out of their employees. The resulting reorganized way of operating for routine growth performances led to a variety of concerns about the compromises each firm makes to fulfill order and service requests.

In the rest of this chapter I describe the routine growth performances of each field site. Activities that periodically disrupt the routine business operations of each firm destabilize each group, providing opportunities for institutional entrepreneurs to create new meanings. For analysis of each firm's routine growth performance, I first describe

each firm leader's strategy for growth. Next, I systematically evaluate the main areas of growth and provide examples and analysis of each. In these analyses, I also call attention to the social skills that firm leaders employ, or fail to employ successfully, to induce cooperation and create meaning for the disrupted firm dynamics that occur during routine growth performances. Each section ends with a summary of leaders' and employees' responses to organizational growth. The chapter concludes with a comparison of each firm that reflects upon the similarities and differences in growth performance.

Rolling Hills

Primary Goal: *Tasty and attractive produce*

Strategic Growth Goal: *Growing into a full-service farm*

Performance: *Penelope - "We can do more for our CSA members, sell prepared sauces, milk...get more renters in these empty rooms...We can compete with those young couples who are first-time farmers."*

Critical Components:

1. *CSA Competition pits the aging Penelope and her rotating crew of short-term volunteers against young farmers who provide both produce and regular community gatherings for their CSA members.*
2. *Rather than compete directly for CSA customers, Penelope instead seeks to diversify the items she can offer her current customers with the development of prepared foods.*
3. *She continues this strategic performance of diversity to pursue other income opportunities. She actively seeks renters for several vacant rooms in her house and offers the opportunity for renters to purchase daily meals. She also hosts fundraisers for the farm, although the appropriateness of the marketing of these events is questionable.*
4. *Despite strides that Penelope makes in each of these areas of growth, she fails to convince her volunteers of the merits of her strategy, although not without employing some strategic tactics. Penelope seeks out the cooperation of individual volunteers, including Aiko and myself, using tactics of issue framing and brokering to successfully induce our cooperation.*
5. *Because of the short-term nature of most volunteers' stay at Rolling Hills, challenges to Penelope's growth strategy were not mounted by farm hands, although it did heighten resentment and occasionally resulted in conflict.*
6. *During times of growth performance, the routine business performance of holistic work activities remained the way of operating among farmhands that excluded themselves (or that Penelope excluded from) activities of growth. Routine growth performance focused on business diversification to accomplish Penelope's strategy of*

developing Rolling Hills into a full-service farm, incorporating the ostensive goal of producing tasty and attractive produce, but not limited by it.

The Competitive World of Community Supported Agriculture

Since the primary source of income for Rolling Hills is its CSA membership, it would seem that expansion efforts should concentrate on building the CSA program. However, there was significant competition for CSA membership in the immediate area. Although Penelope's membership steadily increased over the past few years, she does not do any direct marketing. All new customers have come via word of mouth. Penelope said that most of the other farms in the area with CSAs were run by, "young couples with lots of energy." She said that these farms have been able to "create a community of members" into which people are attracted. In addition to weekly CSA pickups, these farms also held a variety of weekly meetings for members where the farmers would educate CSA members about farming methods, hold discussion groups about agribusiness and politics, host dinner parties, and even have cooking lessons using CSA vegetables and produce.

Penelope said that this engagement is attractive to customers, but she is not able to host those types of activities. She said that although she's very energetic, "much better than most people my age," she does not have the energy to routinely organize elaborate events for her CSA members. Moreover, Penelope spends time working with the local Waldorf School, guest lectures on the Steiner philosophy of education, and participates in weekly choir practice. Even though she believes that providing a breadth of experiences to CSA members constitutes an appropriate, and perhaps ideal holistic form of what a local small farm should offer, Penelope knows she is unable to compete in this way.

Instead, Penelope's strategy for growth was organized around providing more goods and services to her existing clients—although she suggested that current customers would continue to “spread the word,” as Penelope put it, about the offerings at Rolling Hills. Penelope intended to offer her customers a diverse collection of organic, local, (and hopefully) tasty homemade sauces and mixes to purchase. In addition to increasing opportunities for current CSA members, Penelope also hoped to fill vacancies in the rooms on the second floor of the house that she made available to short-term renters, as well as provide add-on food options for those renters. Finally, Penelope hoped to elicit additional help from financial supporters of the farm, who provided assistance through donations.

Because of the human capital limitation—the staff of volunteers works for a limited amount of time, and their daily responsibilities on the farm are consumed by the daily maintenance of farm and housework—Penelope primarily uses her own time towards diversifying her business. And this made sense to the farmhands. As previously described, Rolling Hills had a contract that specified the exchange of food and housing for farm work; and the farmhands had come to see that their efforts supported Penelope's dreams for the farm. However, Penelope tested the boundary of what the small group deemed appropriate when she would request assistance from farmhands to help contribute to the farm's growth. The occasional encroachments on routine business expectations sometimes resulted in conflict.

Don't Mess Up Her Precious Kitchen – Selling Prepared Foods

Harvested vegetables that were imperfect looking would typically end up as food for the volunteers—since Penelope believed that they did not “look beautiful enough” to sell to our CSA members. However, we often could not consume all of the harvested but imperfect items, and Penelope believed that she could create homemade sauces, soups, and spreads from these leftovers. Since Penelope regularly cooked, she knew what she could easily make that she believed would be popular, including tomato sauce, carrot-ginger soup, pesto, and pumpkin puree. She also planned to pickle and can cucumbers, carrots, garlic, and cabbage. However, in order to legally produce and sell these items as certified organic (which was her aim), she needed to build a kitchen and receive an organic goods-producing certification. During the early spring, about eight months after I initially started working at the farm, Penelope hired a contractor and construction crew to develop and build a small kitchen in the garage where CSA pickup was held. Because this area of the garage was already equipped with proper electricity and plumbing, the kitchen was erected in a few weeks. Penelope received certification soon after the construction was complete.

However, Penelope requested that none of the farmhands use the kitchen. Although our daily work did not require our use of the kitchen, Penelope made it clear to all farmhands that we should not use the kitchen to wash our hands or wash vegetables for our own consumption after harvesting. She also forbade us to store anything in the fridge or to use the stove or oven for any cooking. Several farmhands felt resentful about being told that the kitchen area of the garage was “off-limits.” They talked about the hard labor they put into collecting vegetables that Penelope was using to make the homemade

soups and sauces, but as one volunteer said, we “couldn’t be trusted not to mess up her precious kitchen.” This restriction seemed to run contrary to Penelope’s initial concept of the farm being a holistic place for work and learning. Here was an addition to the farm that could provide an opportunity for farmhands to learn a new skill—cooking and canning organic foods—but it was off limits to the farmhands.

Penelope told me that her primary concern about making the kitchen exclusive for her use was based on her concern for food safety. Canning requires a precise process to eliminate the possibility of bacterial formation, and the potential to make someone seriously ill. However, this argument could not be substantiated for those items that Penelope intended to freeze, since the freezing process would kill any bacteria that remained in the food production process. Moreover, several farmhands expressed to me that if Penelope was concerned that “we couldn’t can properly, we’ve told her we want to learn how to do it right...[F]riends at other farms do those things.” But Penelope confided in me that labor production that went into developing her products was already very time consuming and if she was to get assistance from the farmhands, she knows, “it would just take forever to get any of this done.”

The farmhands saw the new organic kitchen and production of prepared foods as an opportunity to learn new skills and perhaps to continue to enable Penelope to reach her goals of creating a “full-service farm.” Rather than these changes contributing to meaning making that reinforced holistic work activities and perhaps greater collaborative work and a closer relationship with Penelope, changes on the farm wound up reaffirming status hierarchies. To the dismay of volunteers, Penelope seemed to hold up her position as a authoritative mother-leader (rather than a nurturing and inclusive mother) by essentially

telling the farmhands to “stay out of my kitchen” and that “it’s not a place for children.”

The farmhands felt resentful from this exclusion.

Room for Rent - Strategies for Using What You Already Have

Pretend Like You’re Not Here

Another revenue generator for the farm is short-term rental of what Penelope refers to as the “upstairs rooms” in the house. Penelope has three rooms that she rents—one has its own bathroom, and the other two share a bathroom. These rooms were typically rented by visiting faculty working at one of the local universities for a few months, occasionally by new residents who were looking for a permanent home but wanted the flexibility of a month-to-month rental, and sometimes by a vacationer passing through that just needed a place to stay for a few days. Penelope provided virtually no amenities for the guests, although they could use the house’s kitchen and they had a section of a fridge in the CSA garage exclusively for them. Typically two rooms were always vacant.

Bringing in more renters was a strategy for growth that Penelope discussed with me when I first met her. She mentioned that the extra revenue could be used to purchase additional livestock that she said she “desperately wanted.” However, several farmhands felt that the way in which Penelope went about getting renters was rather inconsiderate to the volunteers. Aiko told me that when a prospective renter would come to visit the house, Penelope told all the volunteers to “hide your stuff in the closets.” Once I heard Penelope tell the volunteers that things should be cleaned “so it doesn’t look like you’re here” when a prospective renter was scheduled to view the house. Several other

volunteers complained to me that while they complied with Penelope's demands (in that they put their inflatable mattresses away, piled up their sheets in a neat folded pile, and swept the floor), the comments bothered them. They felt that, taken literally, hiding all of their clothes and bedding was a lie to the potential renter. As Aiko put it, "we still all live in the living room, so it's not like they're not going to figure that out if they moved in." To the farmhands, it seemed reasonable to clean up the sleeping areas, but ridiculous to pretend like they're "not there."

Another farmhand suggested that Penelope had "some sort of block" in her head in which she didn't realize how people felt about some of these issues. I asked Aiko if she ever brought to Stephanie, another farm hand, told me that she told Penelope how she felt when potential renters came. I asked how Penelope responded, and she said Penelope said, "Ohhhhhhhh." And then she made a 'concerned' sound and that was it." I was familiar with this closed-lip moan of concern because I had heard it myself in similar situations where Penelope acknowledged and then dismissed someone's comments. However, this issue only got worse over the duration of my data collection as Penelope increasingly sought out renters as part of her growth strategy.

Evidently farmhands recognized the lack of empathetic skill Penelope had in these growth contexts. I never saw her take the time to explain to the farmhands her rationale for wanting the house to be "perfectly clean," an expression I heard her use at another time. Penelope likely believed that it was obvious to the farmhands what her intention was, and simply sought to maintain the status quo by employing direct authority to achieve her desired ends. However, it was clear from the farmhands that these demands increasingly altered their opinion of Penelope—it led to an increased sense that

holistic work that Penelope espoused at the farm was little more than a façade for Penelope's personal interests.

Feeding WhatsHisName Upstairs

In addition to collecting rent from houseguests, Penelope offered the option of a cooked lunch and dinner for guests for \$20. The items used for making the meals primarily came from the farm, although meat was often purchased from the local grocery store. Penelope told me that she is the one who prepares meals for renters. When a renter chose to pay for meals, Penelope would take responsibility for not only making dinner for the renter, but she would prepare enough food for everyone in the house—which seemed to be the most efficient use of time and resources, since most meals were made to carry over for more than one meal. However, I came to find that Penelope would ask Aiko to occasionally cook meals for renters. In addition to being one of the most productive field hands, Aiko was also one of the better cooks. Although the responsibility of meal preparation and cleanup for field hands was part of the required work of volunteers, food preparation for renters that were paying for their meal was beyond the scope of volunteer work.

The following, excerpted from my field notes, is about a renter that stayed for about four weeks:

After some time in the field, Aiko came by to help me collect tomatoes. She had a basket of green peppers (which I didn't realize there were any more to pick, but if there were some to be found, Aiko would be the one to find them.) I asked her about the fact that there's a new boarder [renter], and she said that he's here already. I said "Really? Penelope said someone's coming, not that they're here yet."

Aiko: "Nope, he's here."

Eric: "What's his name?"

Aiko: "I haven't been introduced to him yet."

Eric: "What do you mean?"

Aiko: “Penelope keeps forgetting his name, so she hasn’t told me his name yet. It’s some Chinese name. Filipe can’t pronounce it so he just calls the guy ‘Young Man.’”

Eric: “Is he Chinese, like straight from China.”

Aiko: “No, he’s a professor from the states. He’s on sabbatical and came here. It’s another mouth to feed.”

Eric: laughs. “Another mouth to feed? Why do you say it like it’s your child?”

Aiko: “Because I’ve been doing all the cooking.”

Eric: “Really? Why?”

Aiko: “Because nobody does it and I feel guilty. So I’ve been doing both lunch and dinner.”

Eric: “Tell someone else to do it.”

Aiko: “Nooooo. It’s fine. But I’m tired of my own food. Becca [another volunteer] cooked last night though.”

Eric: “Was it good.”

Aiko: “Yeah. It was okay.”

I found out that Aiko had not only been preparing the majority of recent meals for the farmhands, but she also made extra food for the renter. For lunchtime, one meal is typically cooked for everyone, or the farmhands just grab a sandwich or baked good from the refrigerator. However, Aiko has been cooking lunch for the border for the past week (and she continued cooking lunch and dinner for most of the following week as well) to be sure that the guest had a variety of meals—he should “get his money’s worth,” as Aiko said, if he’s paying for home-cooked meals. In conversations I had with Becca and other volunteers, they said that they were not interested in cooking for “paying houseguests.” As one farmhand said, “it’s not my responsibility.” And another suggested that, “if Penelope wants renters, she needs to take care of them. I’m not working in a bed and breakfast here.”

In a conversation I had with Penelope, I found that Penelope told Aiko that she would pay her for the cooking she did for renters. She said that she would give Aiko \$10 a day for making the extra food of both meals. “Since she often cooked anyway,” Penelope said, “It seemed like she could make a little play money for when she goes into

the city.” Aiko confirmed that she was offered money for cooking, but she said she “felt bad” about taking money from Penelope since she was “always talking about how she has so little money to begin with.” But Aiko said that when she did go into the city, Penelope gave Aiko \$100. Even though Aiko initially refused to take it, she did take the money in the end because, as she said, “I didn’t want to get into a fight [with Penelope]...and I wanted to eat out at this restaurant I read about.”

Evidently, the plan to grow the business through increasing the number of renters and then providing them the option to purchase meals caused tension between the farm hands and Penelope. Even though Penelope introduced a financial benefit to the farmhands for their assistance, unsettling the shared understanding of why volunteers came to the farm, this did not convince them that they should offer assistance in meal preparation. Penelope was not able to develop a sense of selflessness in this growth performance and induce cooperation during these times of instability. As a result of this poor enactment of social skills, most volunteers came to believe that any money-making activities beyond the CSA members, were not something that the farmhands should be. Because of her inability to elicit help from the farmhands as a group, Penelope again sought out Aiko, coercing her into cooking meals for the renter. Penelope recognized Aiko’s good-naturedness and willingness to assist Penelope when she is asked. Moreover, Penelope appears adept in framing issues with Aiko, by convincing her to do the labor of cooking in exchange for “play money” while instilling a sense of guilt in Aiko by repeatedly calling attention to the farm’s limited finances.

Even though Penelope promised Aiko \$10 for each meal preparation, I know that the \$100 she eventually received did not equal the number of meals Aiko prepared.

Penelope may have been able to convince Aiko in the short term to help with her own growth strategy, but I came to find Aiko increasingly resenting Penelope's choices of growth pursuits at the farm. Aside from Aiko, the farmhands believed that they were fulfilling their end of their relationship expectations with their work on the farm, but that Penelope was increasingly failing to fulfill her obligation. As a result, during transition times when some volunteers were leaving the farm and others were in the process of first joining, those more senior volunteers began to frame Penelope in a negative light, rather than the mother-leader holistic-oriented farmer that she aimed to be.

After a few weeks of preparing meals for the renter, "Young Man" dropped the meal plan. Aiko told me that Penelope was "really relieved about it. It seems that he didn't really like the food too much and he also felt there were too many vegetables there for him."

Is This a Birthday Party or a Fundraiser?

Towards the end of my time collecting data, Penelope began organizing a 75th Birthday party for her husband Jon. Penelope was very excited about invitations that she made on her computer. She intended to mail them, but insisted on showing me what they looked like before she went to the post office. When she showed me the invitations, I was unsure if I was looking at a birthday party celebration or an invitation to host a fundraiser for solar panels. Penelope said, "I didn't just want to make it a party. I mean if people are planning on getting Jon a birthday gift anyway, they should help get something he needs." The top of the invitation included celebratory comments about Jon, including the time (7:00 PM) and location (Penelope's house) of the dinner party. The bottom half of

the invitation was information about the solar panels that Jon is hoping to install on the shed, and that “\$25 contributions are encouraged for this fundraising effort.”

It seemed clear to me that Penelope wanted to show me the card before she sent it out because she was concerned about its wording. Although she didn’t state it outright, her concern was evidently about bundling a birthday party with a fundraiser. Perhaps she felt that there was some sort of manipulation involved, since she was trying to appeal to people’s interest in celebrating Jon’s birthday but she was also requesting something specific of them—this was a fundraiser dinner that would cost \$25 per person. Although the cards struck me as a bit odd, Penelope had already printed out the invites. I assumed she was going to go through with mailing them regardless of any comments I would make, and she just wanted confirmation that this was a good idea. So I told her that I thought it looked great and that “it makes sense to pair efforts to get a solar panel with the birthday since it’s useful for him and the farm.” Penelope replied, “You know I’d wish everyone would come and slap down \$75 on the table, but...” and laughs. Penelope said I should also tell my friends about the party so “we can get as many people here as possible.” She said that she “had promised” people last year when she held a fundraiser (which was exclusively a fundraiser dinner for the purpose of raising money to purchase materials for the shed) that she would have another fundraiser. Since she was “already planning Jon’s birthday, it just worked out,” Penelope said.

I believe that Penelope may not have been completely comfortable herself with the framing of this event and she sought my approval, since I was someone whose opinion she respected. An alternative reading of the situation is that Penelope was employing a social skill tactic to bring me on board with her idea by framing this issue in

a way that she thought I would be comfortable with. I believe that because I was someone who was well-liked by the other volunteers, Penelope may have hoped that I would act as a broker between her and the farm hands who may not want to be a part of this birthday-fundraiser. Penelope needs farmhands on board with this party because she requires their help with both food preparation in the days leading up to the event, and to work as servers during the event itself. At this time of the year there were only four volunteers on the farm, and their help was required in order for the event to be successful. But such activities for farmhands are outside the scope of the volunteers' work contract.

At this point in my data collection, I was spending just one morning a week on the farm, as it was not currently the growing season and it was the tail end of my data collection. I was not around for most of the conversations Penelope had with volunteers about the party. Nonetheless, I found myself advocating on Penelope's behalf—empathizing with volunteers about the “weirdness” of “imposing a fundraiser as a birthday” but framing the issue as “important for the farm to continue to grow and be self-sustaining.” Stepping back from these interactions, I was uncertain if I believed these fundraising efforts were an appropriate growth strategy for the farm, but I did not feel that it detracted from my own identity as a farm hand. I realized that I had accepted Penelope's questionable logic about the birthday-fundraiser and provided encouragement for the farmhands to get on board with the event. It seems now that Penelope had realized, as she had with Aiko, that she had the right sort of social skill to solicit me as a broker to help induce others to participate as food preparers and servers to benefit the farm's growth.

Summary of Growth Operations at Rolling Hills

To achieve her strategic goal of creating a full-service farm, Penelope sought to reposition the meaning of the routine work operations and the identity of her volunteers. Rather than promoting holistic work opportunities as she attempts to do during routine business operations, Penelope excludes volunteers from some aspects of her growth strategy while attempting to use their good will to encourage greater participation in other facets of growth. During these periodic growth activities, Penelope transparently demonstrates her seemingly selfish intentions for revenue-generation. Although these efforts are needed to grow the farm, she fails to harness the necessary social skills to explain and demonstrate the significance of these efforts. Instead, she induces cooperation through direct authority when she is able, like requesting clean up of the sleeping quarters. However, when Penelope seeks voluntary assistance as in the cooking of meals for renters, the farmhands turn their backs on her. Even her offers of financial compensation fail to elicit the desired help. This should not be surprising considering that volunteers identify as farm hands (as described in Chapter 5) and see their assistance as supporting farming endeavors. Penelope failed to successfully frame her growth strategy efforts within a non-selfish context, and thus failed to solicit the support she may have hoped for. As a consequence, volunteers seemed to reinforce their identity as farm hands and the meaning of their time at the farm as a holistic work experience during times of unsettling growth performance.

Nevertheless, Penelope was able to convince both Aiko and myself to assist her with several of her growth efforts. She successfully induced Aiko's help with cooking for the renter and was able to turn me into a broker to solicit the assistance of other

farmhands for Jon's party-fundraiser. Although both Aiko and myself came to see our efforts in strategic growth as necessary for the farm's growth, the meanings we came to understand through Penelope's efforts were also attached to feelings of resentment. Thus, while Penelope's strategic maneuvers provided Penelope support as she worked towards the strategic growth goals in the short term, it also left Aiko feeling aggrieved. Although Aiko had intended on leaving Rolling Hills for more structured training on a larger farm, Penelope told me that she hoped Aiko would stay for a long time to come and help her continue to grow the farm. Penelope was never able to convince Aiko to stay, and she left a few months after the completion of my data collection.

AeroGears

Primary Goal: *A precise part*

Growth Strategy: *Make as many pieces as possible and ship*

Performance: Alex - *"We shouldn't be a job shop anymore....but a world class organization."*

Critical Components:

1. *From AeroGears' origins as a small urban job shop, producing parts for local businesses, Leo has helped lead an expansion effort over the last few decades to include large commercial manufacturers as well as international aerospace corporations. This has poised AeroGears to transition to a factory that can focus exclusively on complex, large production jobs, competing for some of the most lucrative projects at their level of the supply chain.*

2. *Despite a few recent hires with high levels of expertise (i.e. Alex the Quality Control Manager, Keith the Assistant Quality Control Manager, and most recently Fred the Assistant Floor Manager), Leo and Jack's continued control over all aspects of production are hurting the company's ability to successfully deliver on their agreed contracts.*

3. *AeroGears' managers came to understand Leo's growth strategy as "gluttonous"—he seemed to bid on all large scale contracts that he came across. For those bids he won, AeroGears would simply produce as many parts as quickly as possible and ship what they had by the contract deadline.*

4. *This strategy not only resulted in missed deadlines for complete orders, but occasionally imprecisely produced parts were shipped that were noncompliant and required rework. Such errors were not only time consuming and financially costly, but embarrassed AeroGears managers, damaged the company's reputation, and decreased their chances of winning future bids.*

5. Keith, Fred, and myself were given the responsibility by Jack to capture more information about the flow of pieces in the shop in order to have more accurate information to make bids and report work progress to clients. However, we all believed the meanings of these efforts were nonsensical, aggravating all of us. It had always been evident that Jack was unable to demonstrate a capacity for empathy or the strategic tactics to induce cooperation, and this was also true during the routine growth performance.

6. The three of us, who ordinarily did not collaborate on any projects, banded together in passive aggressive resistance to these "progress reports." Although through direct authority we capitulated to Jack's demands in creating a "Word Document to NoWhere," it seemed that through an alliance, Keith, Fred, and I were able to maintain work identities that provided us a sense of motivation to follow through on work that seemed useless.

"We're Still An Infant"

After settling another issue one morning between Leo and Jack (where Leo once again interfered with the way Jack distributed work to the factory floor employees), Leo turned to me in the late afternoon and said: "So what do you think about our disorganization?" and smiles.

Eric: "Well, it seems like there's a lot of growth currently happening, so it's difficult to get processes in place."

Leo: "We've been growing for 53 years and we're still an infant."

In comparison to other aerospace manufacturers, AeroGears is objectively small in terms of the number of employees, the quantity of parts it produces, and its revenue. However, Leo wants the company to grow from a "small parts shop" to "an aerospace company." Alex had used similar terminology to Leo, and described to me how he differentiated a "good company" from a "world class operation." A world-class organization, he said, has processes in place with people that follow them. What this means, according to Alex, is if someone left their position, there would be a brief hiccup, "maybe things would slow down momentarily, but otherwise, things would correct themselves rather quickly." Alex said that making that change is extremely difficult and

"number one" (referencing Leo) has a lot to deal with all the time, and it's a huge undertaking to institute more processes.

Leo's definition of a successful aerospace company was different from Alex's. Leo believed that the organization needed more simply to be bigger in order to appear like a world-class organization. Rather than implementing new procedures as Alex would suggest, Leo's strategy for growth was focused on acquiring as many large contracts as he could win through low bids, and make as many aerospace parts as possible in completion of those contracts—which did not necessarily mean fully meeting the contract parameters. It seemed that Leo believed this to be an appropriate growth strategy, but he was not able to convince all AeroGears managers of this.

Alex said that AeroGears was already competent in producing a variety of small parts, and it was time for them to "get into the next class of jobs." He said that if you're making nuts for a Fearless Flyer you're selling as a toy, "you'll make nuts and sell them for three cents." But you can make similar nuts, with "a slightly different material, maybe a little different operation, and sell them for \$300." He said that the only types of jobs factories in America are doing are "those high end jobs. Those cheap bolts are being purchased from India and China... So if you're sitting in an American job shop making nuts for toys, you're not going to be around for much longer."

Alex said that "this place" has already changed from "a job shop into something different... [W]e've had a neighborhood change, so to speak... We should be moving to the next class of jobs we handle." He said we want to not be considered an afterthought for "the Boeings of the world," but be at the top of their list of places to go. Alex said that AeroGears needed to get the operation to that next level. "But to get there, you need to

innovate.” Again, in Alex’s world, innovation means to put processes in place, use the available software and process information to develop more accurate bids for parts and completion dates, and update employees’ skills through ongoing training. Despite these suggestions and his occasional optimism that AeroGears could continue to progress and develop into an aerospace factory, Alex usually fell back to his belief that Jack and Leo’s tight control over the organization inhibited employees’ abilities to move the organization into its next phase.

Reaching Above Your Means

Leo the Glutton

In order to get AeroGears’ foot in the door with intermediary companies that purchase small gears, affixed them to other parts, and then sell those parts to plane manufacturers, Leo would sometimes put in very low bids on contracts. Through this process, intermediary organizations could “test AeroGears out,” as Jack explained the rationale. Underpricing the cost of producing parts was something that AeroGears very recently began doing during times of routine growth performance. Rather than bidding an appropriate price and perhaps conservatively estimating the time needed to complete a complex aerospace job, Leo instead took a risk to win the bid. However, in a recent instance, AeroGears sent “bad parts” to a customer. Alex was very upset and told me, “it’s just embarrassing.” Because of Alex’s pride in his work, such embarrassment impacted his identity as a quality assurance manager. He went on to say that we took a loss for the hope of getting new business and now we might not get any new jobs “because we blew it.”

Alex said that the reason why we wound up with bad parts is because “Leo kept going to floor and asking, ‘How far along are we? When are we going to get done?’ on repeat.” So, Alex said they rushed the job a bit, “didn’t follow protocol exactly, and there you go.” I recorded a number of instances in my field notes where Leo’s interference in shop floor work resulted in poor parts production. The routine business operation isolated the performance of the shop floor workers in a stick to your task performance, a process that mostly worked when Jack maintained complete authority of the process of jobs through the factory. However, when Leo inserts himself into the process, there were often poor outcomes.

As part of the routine growth performance at AeroGears, Leo hoped to make as many pieces as possible, as quickly as possible, without planning how to accomplish the task given the parameters of the firm. Often, these efforts were not successful in acquiring the organization any additional aerospace parts—particularly after errors were made. Moreover, because of Leo’s low bid for the job, AeroGears lost money on the work. Alex suggested that Leo took this job because he’s “a glutton, so he’s going to take everything that comes his way.” But the result of this routine growth performance was a compromise on quality and a violation of the few processes Alex had put in place to try and prevent such poorly produced parts.

We’ll Make What We Can “And Then PO it”

In AeroGears’ effort to “produce little gems” for their clients, as Alex called quality aerospace parts, and increasingly develop their aerospace business, AeroGears took on more jobs than it had the capacity to manage successfully (as was evident from the example in the previous section). This assessment by Keith (the new Quality

Assurance Assistant) and Fred (another recent hire who served as an Assistant Floor Manager) was based on the high number of late deliveries that AeroGears was making. The reason for this increase in late order fulfillment had multiple causes, including lack of skill expertise among staff and a limited number of staff. But perhaps most detrimental was the inadequate method of production floor management. It was increasingly evident that Jack's "magical yellow pad" was incapable of tracking all the parts being processed in the shop.

AeroGears has been making sixteen lucrative aerospace parts for the NTW Group (a large supplier of parts in the aerospace industry supply chain) on a monthly basis. However, AeroGears was not always able to complete these monthly orders for NTW. Nevertheless, production cannot be rushed. In alignment with the firm's ostensive goal of producing a precise part, Alex would reiterate that it is "better to deliver a perfect product late, than an imperfect product on time." Over the time of my data collection, I would often hear discussions between Leo and Jack about what to do when it was clear that AeroGears was not going to be able to deliver on items they promised. Jack would say: "We're going to make as many as we can today and then PO it." And when they would PO it, they would ship Red (the name given to overnight shipping that costs exponentially more than a basic ground shipment). The following example is taken from my field notes:

About 9am, Jamie came back up stairs after speaking with Jack and was telling Keith that Jack told her to tell Jerome (their contact at NTW) that he has eleven pieces that are ready to ship by the due date and asked if he'd like a partial shipment and then send the rest, or send them all, or what. From what I heard from Jamie, Jerome told her to send what they had and close the order. When they place next month's order they'll up the quantity they typically ask for. After she got off the phone with Jerome, Jamie said, the motto at AeroGears is now, "if we're late, we're late. What we have done, we have

done. And that's it." She turned around and told me that this is "what Jack wants...so this I what we do." [and shrugs her shoulders].

The accomplishment of AeroGears' ostensive goal of creating a precise part still seems to be the critical organizing factor, even during the routine growth performance—Leo and Jack aim to send quality parts rather than to send a complete order with questionable quality. While it would seem that the meaning of the work has not changed, Leo's desire to increase production has altered the firm's perception of their own ability to complete their work, unsettling the shared values that some employees understood as central to AeroGears. Even Jamie, who always appeared very detached from her work, seemed to feel that AeroGears was not quite living up to its expectations by regularly shipping partial orders to its customers.

Musical Chairs: Due Dates on the Move

Failing to comply with contract deadlines seemed to be a critical issue in aerospace, particularly because of the competition AeroGears faced from other small manufacturers. Keith said that "we have the same bottlenecks with the production flow like other companies have, but we don't figure out how to solve it." These bottlenecks have resulted in delayed deliveries and a drop in the average on-time deliver rate to about 90%. AeroGears attempts to match an industry standard of 96-98% on-time rate. Keith said that now that AeroGears has low ratings, "now we're on probation with NTW." He said that Leo now has been calling NTW to reassure them that we're doing things to put ourselves back into position to get things in on time. Late deliveries do not only cause issues between AeroGears and NTW, but AeroGears must also keep track of their on-time rates as part of the AS9100 accreditation. Failing to achieve industry standard on-

time rates may result in the accreditation board requiring a factory to reevaluate its production process. Keith believed that “we’re not learning how to correct the issue even though we talk about it all the time.”

Keith told me that AeroGears was still bidding for NTW parts, but he said that “they’re not really considering us for new things...and why should they if we can’t get our current parts to them on time now?” Keith went on to say that the reason we previously had a good on-time record with NTW is because “a guy named Shawn was working closely with us and would move the due dates around when we knew we couldn’t deliver the items on time.” Exasperated, Keith said, “Did we honestly think that that was going to go on like that forever?” Shawn retired and now someone named Jerome is responsible for our account, and “he’s unwilling to push any due date back. So, as a result, we’ve gotten late on stuff.” Keith assumes that Jerome is unwilling to move due dates because he is new in the position and he wants to try and impress his own bosses—which means pushing suppliers to come through on their original promised dates. Keith went on to say that if Jerome’s boss, “or someone above both of them really did their due diligence and saw that the dates in the past have been changed to accommodate AeroGears’ schedule, and now we’re continuing to have the same issue after previous accommodations were made, then someone might say, ‘it’s time to switch out AeroGears and try someone else.’” He said that while Leo has a good relationship with a number of different “boss’s bosses” at NTW that will help “protect or shield AeroGears from losing its account at the moment,” it’s certainly going to be the case that if NTW chose to really look into it, they would realize that AeroGears is not being successful and that someone else can be found to replace us if desired.

Keith actually used to work at NTW. Keith said that he and his friends there would say that, "There's only two Boeings but there's hundreds of little guys [suppliers] they could use." Keith said they would say this to remind small companies with whom they placed orders that if they do not do the work as contracted, NTW would just find someone else. Here it seems that Keith is calling into question his own sense of identity working with AeroGears. Keith seems frustrated that he is working for the type of dispensable small manufacturer that does not follow through on their contacts. It is the exact sort of organization that he and his former colleagues once joked about. Keith is frustrated with the way that the organization is handling its growth performance, but feels incapable of influencing this system—he finds weekly meetings to be useless, despite any issues he presents. The result of this lack of adequate support for the planning of work production resulted in constant delays seemed antithetical to the pride Keith took in his own work.

The Word Document to NoWhere

Although some incremental steps were taken to try and more systematically track part production progress, none of these attempts provided the organization increased knowledge of the process to enable more effective production decisions. For example, Jack instructed Fred, Keith and I to develop an Excel file for our aerospace parts, and develop links from each Excel cell to individual Word documents (which we would update daily) to track work flow. The purpose of such a document, which would be saved on AeroGear's shared server, was so multiple users could access the progress of parts. Moreover, when representatives from NTW came for their monthly visits and view

updates on our production progress (known as Milestone Reports), Jack could print out this Excel file and the accompanying Word documents and show work progress—certainly this would constitute a step up from the Magic Yellow Pad, Jack thought. At the very least, it seemed that Jack believed this was the sort of process that would enable the organization to grow—although it was clear that Alex thought this sort of document was rather useless.

The creation of this document did nothing to ameliorate the issue of proper scheduling—from material ordering, to cutting, to moving worked parts through the shop to the ideal machines to maximize machine use and employee skill, etc. Incremental attempts to create processes and organize around growth often resulted in resentment among workers. Fred, Alex, and Keith all felt that this Excel-to-Word document system was a waste of everyone's time. Keith said that, "it adds confusion to the system, not clarity," and Alex (who was not a part of constructing the document, but freely shared his two cents) said that he "would never look to that system for an accurate account of works in progress anyway."

After Keith, Fred, and myself spent several days developing this set of documents, Keith seemed to finally get fed up. He was still failing to see how the time spent on this document would benefit the company in the short or the long term. During a brief meeting, Keith said: "Look how many personnel hours have already been devoted to this? The three of us are sitting around trying to figure out how to best organize this, and we still don't really know what the purpose is." I attempted to answer his question, arguing that the information we were organizing on these Word documents was redundant, but it was a condensed version that everyone could access. I found myself

trying to rationalize this activity so I could sort of convince myself of its worth and thereby justify the mental (and physical) energy required to create the documents. But I did agree with Keith. There was little short-term benefit and no real long-term purpose for these documents or the daily updates that were required for them to maintain their usefulness. Perhaps the yellow pad and the daily white out and updates could be maintained indefinitely. The true solution to job progression was to update our computer software (which was the task Leo originally hired me to do)—what we were doing instead with this Excel-to-Word document could hardly even be considered a Band-Aid. I felt that it was mostly theater for Jack to feel more organized and perhaps even to convince NWT executives that we appeared organized.

The three of us realized that without proper insight into the purpose of these documents, we could not really determine how best to organize them. So Keith and Fred decided that we needed to talk to Jack. Keith and I went to Jack's office and I asked, "Can we ask you a quick question about the Word document?" To which he responded, "Not now." Upon returning upstairs, Keith, Fred and I continued to complain about this task. Suddenly Jack came leaping upstairs to speak with us.

I began the conversation and told Jack that we were trying to determine what precisely was to be on these sheets, but we weren't sure exactly of the purpose. He said that he wanted something to organize the location of all the different parts in a document that is available for anyone to access. He then gave an example. "Suppose Jamie gets a call from a client who wants to get an update. Instead of checking with me or Leo, she has access to the information and can just look it up." This seemed reasonable, although again, the time it would take Fred to update each Word document on a daily basis would

exceed the amount of time it would take if Jamie just asked Leo or Jack for an updated status if a client was to call.

Keith was interested in knowing how the documents would help us with planning so that we can be sure that the parts are being processed on time and getting out the door when needed. Keith specifically asked how we should determine what the due dates are for each job so we can put that information in the document as well. Jack responded: “There’s no point in putting in a projected due date because it’s meaningless.” He went on to say that “things just get done as there’s time to get stuff done.” He gave an example of the paperwork that needs to be completed for any particular order. He said that whenever a PO comes in, the paperwork should just get started, and “when someone has the time to take care of it, they should.” But he said, if we were to plan out due dates for all these different parts, “it would be a futile exercise because they may change almost on a daily basis.” There’s no way of really determining projected due dates because there’s so many things that come up that alters dates—improperly made parts, delayed shipments of raw materials, broken machinery, improper chemical or heat treated items, and even broken machinery. Jack then asked if we had any more questions, to which Keith responded “No,” and then Jack went back downstairs to his office.

I was a little dumbfounded by what I had just heard. It seemed that Jack did not honestly believe that there was an appropriate way to estimate the time to produce parts, making it completely clear that any efforts to developing a method to track parts production was for appearance only. Keith and Fred, who each had worked at several other manufacturing companies prior to AeroGears were caught off guard by this comment as well. What was the point in generating progress reports if their daily change

seemed entirely unpredictable? Although one intention of the reports was to consolidate and disseminate information, this was truly a redundant task. Like Keith, I had assumed this effort would help us with the more critical concern of generating better predictions on how quickly we could complete parts in order for Jack to better project to clients when parts would be complete, and for Leo to develop more accurate estimates when bidding on contracts. Was this not the point of spending time capturing organizational data during this routine growth performance? This seemed entirely unsettling. Keith, Fred and I spent the next thirty minutes discussing how ridiculous this exercise was, how appalled we were with Jack's comment, and also how it helped clarify for us why things were "such a mess here" as Keith put it. "If Jack doesn't believe that we can actually create any order through capturing data, then of course we'll never fix any of the problems here."

Although we all felt rather deflated about the task given to us, we still capitulated to this work. It seemed that Jack did not recognize the destabilizing nature of his comments, and he did not offer any new explanation and sense of meaning for us to better understand our task during this time of growth. Thus, the three of us also shared a somewhat passive aggressive bond about these documents that we helped to periodically update over the next few months. Sometimes we neglected to make any changes, even those we knew about, to see if Jack or Leo would notice—and they never did, confirming Jack's own belief that the document truly served no purpose. We were sure to update the master Excel file that would be printed out for Milestone Report meetings with NTW representatives, but left the affiliated Word documents untouched. Although we all recognized how childish this challenge was to Jack's authority, we knew there was little we were able to do about our obligation to update the documents. However, it helped the

three of us to know that we saw through this charade and were able to prove it to ourselves. Nevertheless, while we learned to maintain our humor about these growth strategy tasks, the reality of the way the organization continued to operate, perpetually failing to meet deadlines while continually putting out new bids, made us all feel like the firm's leaders were out of touch with what was needed to successfully grow AeroGears into a world class organization. A Word Document to NoWhere was certainly not going to help direct us.

Summary of AeroGears Growth Performance

Alex noted on multiple occasions that, "This company has a lot of potential, but they're not in a place to keep up. Look, we're falling behind on orders. That's not good for us." Alex believed that a growth performance must involve AeroGears putting resources in place to create more precise processes, to make the company a "world class" organization. The current operation, to make as many parts as possible and "PO it," was "inadequate" according to Alex, who also felt embarrassed by AeroGears' increasingly poor track record. Alex went on to say that when he leaves, "it'll fall apart. When Jack leaves, it'll fall apart. Because so much of the information that's been created has not yet been institutionalized." Despite his desire for growing the organization through more human resources and structure, Alex knew that he had little control in making that happen, regardless of how much social skill he could muster. He said: "At the end of the day, when quality reviews come, you know my stuff is in order," perpetuating the routine business operations of sticking to your own task (even though he would prefer to take a more active role in changing the organizational structure). He believed that those with

more power and authority than he were not enabling AeroGears to move forward—and he was frustrated with trying to do any more than ensuring his individual responsibilities are covered. Despite his ability for empathetic behavior, it does not seem that any strategic tactics could forge any coalition of employees to foster change. Jack’s aggressive personality and Leo’s decision to give him free range over treatment of employees, meant that a challenger in the organization would likely be reprimanded enough that they would voluntarily leave.

Aside from the human relations management concerns that seem to be an ongoing issue at AeroGears, the factory has been growing in the amount of contracts it has been winning. However, this growth in work was not accompanied by a growth in process improvement. In fact, the responsibility that Jack gave to Keith, Fred and myself to create a smoke and mirrors documents that feigns control over our production flows exacerbated our sense of a destabilized organization. Keith was especially filled with anger about Jack’s routine growth performance, which seemed to affect Keith’s own identity as a quality assurance expert. The decision of the three of us to passively challenge Jack bound us together in a way that afforded us some motivation to continue our day-to-day work. However, these activities made us feel that AeroGears was somewhat out of control, and not an organization that could legitimately become a world-class factory.

ElderCare

Primary Goal: *Compassionate care*

Growth Strategy: *Get clients and fill jobs*

Performance: *“We need to be on the top of the referral list...we need to be able to fulfill client requests and we cannot turn down opportunities for new clients.”*

Critical Components:

1. After the first year of business, working out the kinks of operating a home health aide franchise and coming to terms with the emotional reality that many of the firm's clients will die, Alice's concern as ElderCare's owner was focused on meeting her weekly revenue goals.

2. As a result of Alice's development of a growth strategy focused on "hitting the numbers," the routine business performance of collaborative efforts took a back seat to taking all clients and filling demands with any available aide, even to the objections of other ElderCare staff.

3. In efforts to fill client requests, ElderCare staff members, including Alice, taxi around aides who do not have their own transportation. Such tasks take time away from more critical work, causing resentment among staff members.

4. The implementation of these strategies for increasing revenue seemed to run counter to ElderCare's ostensive goal of providing compassionate care, causing Jenn to question the focus of ElderCare's operations and the group's identity.

5. Alice's attempts to suggest that these activities were necessary for firm solvency were rejected by Jenn. In turn, Jenn challenged some of these changes through tactics of aggregating interests and networking to outliers to build a coalition to support efforts against some aspects of Alice's growth strategy.

No Time to Grieve – Maintaining Revenue in ElderCare Care

Even though the ostensive goal at ElderCare is compassionate care, Alice and Jenn had to learn that this organizational goal should not be confused with emotional attachment. Alice and Jenn both told me about their grief when their first client died. They were in the office when they got the phone call from the client's child, and they cried, hugged, and consoled each other. Both expressed to me that they felt (however briefly) that this industry was "too emotionally taxing." However, these sentiments and attachments to their clients inevitably changed over time. In one weekly staff meeting, we began talking about this issue and Jenn said that after she learned to cope with the first few clients, now when a patient dies, she immediately thinks, "Come on people, we need to find some new clients, we need to pick up business." The part time nurse says that it's not when a patient dies that she begins to think like this, "but when a patient goes on

hospice...That's when Alice tells us we need to pick it up." Alice confirmed this with, "That's right." [And we all smiled and nodded.]

In another conversation, Alice explained to me that we have to remember that we are operating a business. In this industry, "30% of business is always in flux...The fact of the matter is that many of your clients will die. And you always need to find new clients." As a result of the reality that her clients regularly die, Alice would sometimes frustratingly say: "You cannot grow this business because you gain a piece of business, you leave a piece of business." In addition to elderly clients that pass away while receiving care, clients' situations change in other ways—sometimes an elderly client is too sick to continue to receive care at home and needs to go into an assisted living facility, or adult children move their sick parent into their own home, or the elderly client does not like an ElderCare home health aide and they do not want a replacement aide, instead pursuing home health care from another organization.

On the whiteboard in the office's small conference room, Alice would put up the company's sales during each weekly meeting. In order for the organization to break even, we needed to have revenue of \$25,000 per week. Although Alice told me that the franchise headquarters suggested that she should reach this goal by the end of year two, it was more than two years before she broke this mark. However, the organization did not break even each week. During the time I collected data, many weeks hovered around \$17,000. Alice believed that because of the corporate experiences of most of the executives at the franchise headquarters as well as other current franchise owners, she has not been able to get advice that has enabled her to reach consistent break-even numbers.

She felt that franchise owners were very good at the start-up phase, “and when business reaches over \$1.5 million, but they’re not so good with the in-between.”

Alice is in a constant struggle to bring on more clients (and preferably those requiring substantial hours of weekly care), at greater than replacement rate of clients that die or cut their need for service. In order to attract new business, the franchise headquarters does general advertising, but local marketing is left to each franchisee to tackle. Alice periodically employed a salesperson whose primary job was to foster contacts with local hospitals, convalescence homes, and short-term care facilities. These connections can be critical revenue generators for ElderCare. When an elderly individual goes to the hospital for some sort of emergency, his or her spouse or children typically have no planning in place to transition their parent (or spouse) back home. When an elderly patient is discharged from the hospital, a case manager responsible for making recommendations for the client’s family maintains a list of service providers that he or she recommends to discharged patients and their families. Dozens of elderly people are released from local hospitals each day, suggesting hundreds of potential clients each month. Getting on one of these service provider lists, and more importantly, getting the case manager to recommend ElderCare to a discharged patient, is a critical goal for Alice. Those organizations that achieve high status on those lists are typically larger businesses that can provide clients a breadth of services. Larger organizations also have nurses available to provide assessments for clients and create care plans the same day a client calls, and they have aides available to work in a client’s home the very next day a client requests assistance.

Alice recognizes that her resources are limited in comparison to large home health care organizations, but she still seeks to compete against them. Since large organizations' resources far surpass her own, Alice believes that through higher levels of customer service, enacting the ostensive goal of compassionate care, she can effectively compete and win clients. However, even though this perspective is espoused in the office, Alice's reality is that compromises to care are often made when the need to grow looms large. Rather than providing compassionate care in an office whose routine business operations is collaboration, a growth performance has meant not turning down opportunities for business, even if they accept business that begins to blur the firm's ostensive goal and alter the work identities of ElderCare staff.

Murky Waters and Risky Business

"Why Do You Want This Case So Bad?"

Alice makes her frustrations clear at weekly meetings of the difficulty of reaching her weekly break-even numbers. "Making \$12,500 a week is a failing business...and when I get up to \$17,500, I lose a client. So where does that leave me?" She said she "doesn't know how to get over that hump because we keep slipping back down."

Moreover, Alice said that ElderCare headquarters has not offered her any solutions. In a conversation between Alice and her accountant, I heard the following:

Alice: "They [ElderCare headquarters] tell you it's a two to three year thing [to be running a successful business], but it's really a five year process...And now we're finally doing okay, but there's always more to be done... I'd like to hire a sales person because there's so much going on here."

Accountant: "I understand. I see this with a lot of clients."

Alice: "And when do I reach that magic moment..."

Accountant: "and breathe." He smiles.

Alice: "If ever, right!"

During routine times of business growth, Alice's solution to improve the business's numbers seemed to be a compromise on the quality of the home health providers she places in a client's home. This process was very reactive—get clients first, and then fulfill the request for service however possible. During routine business operations, the office staff would collaborate to determine which aide was appropriate for each client, working through a deliberate process of ensuring the best match. However during routine growth operations, it seemed that careful selection was often not a critical point of consideration. Getting the job was paramount. If ElderCare is to grow into a substantial, “legitimate” home health organization that effectively provides for potential clients, Alice believed she needed to be able to fulfill requests that came in, rather than turn business away. This strategy not only raised weekly numbers, but demonstrated ElderCare's quick responsiveness to hospital care managers, increasing the probability of future recommendations.

Although ElderCare primarily filled jobs that required hourly work—clients required just a few hours of care a day, several days a week—live-in work was the most lucrative. In these arrangements, aides lived in the homes of clients, providing 24-hour care. Most aides sought this sort of work because it provided them steady income and the opportunity to work with a client that they could get to know well and for whom they often felt they could provide a good quality of life. This sort of care was financially costly for clients, who could typically spend less if they lived in an elder care home.

During routine growth performance, when ElderCare had the opportunity to take on a new live-in—even if they did not have an aide who ideally matched the skill set needed to perform the organizational goals optimally—they took a chance. They would

sometimes assign an aide they had reservations about, or assign a recent hire whom they had not fully vetted. Although such matching was risky, Alice framed this decision as a necessary risk for growth. The following story is excerpted from my field notes:

There was a disagreement this morning about taking on a new client. Jenn was out of the office driving an aide to an assignment when Alice answered the call of a new client needing help (or, perhaps it was a former client that was returning from the hospital and needed some assistance). In any event, it sounded like Alice decided to take the job. When Jenn came back to the office she was a bit harried (likely from sitting in traffic, which I sat in for hours the previous day because of all the flooding in the area). Jenn didn't even get to her desk yet and Alice started the conversation with, "you're not necessarily going to like what I decided to do, but..." And then Alice said that she wanted to assign Candice to a three-day overnight stay. (Just a week prior, Candice was removed from a client's home because she was not following the nurse's Care Plan—rather than giving the client a strict food diet created by the client's nutritionist, she was cooking him and buying him whatever he wanted. While this doesn't seem so bad—an old man wanting to eat whatever he feels like—the result was that his blood pressure was elevated and he wound up sleeping more and exercising less. Candice continued to do this even after she was warned not to.)

With the suggestion that Candice should be given a new job so quickly, Jenn immediately began shaking her head and said, "That's a bad idea." Alice countered, very calm and even (while Jenn was clearly exhibiting a more emotional response, as could be heard in her tone). Alice's argument however pertained more to general company issues and the need to grow, rather than to the immediate and substantive issue that Candice was not trustworthy.

Jenn: "Why do you want this case so bad?"

Alice: "We are not building. We are stuck. Look at that wall..." She points to the dry erase board on the wall in the main part of the office that list several cases pending—potential clients that are leaving hospitals or convalescence homes soon and will be requiring assistance—as well as cases that will be ending soon, because clients will be moving out of their homes into full-time care facilities, or have been on hospice for some time and are unfortunately, likely to die soon. Alice points to this dry erase board often when making a point about needing to add clients. Although, when she does this sort of dramatic pointing Jenn usually rolls her eyes or lets out a giggle, suggesting that Alice can reference the economics of the business on a dry erase board all she wants but Jenn still does not accept the decision. Regardless, Jenn's laughter suggests that she disagrees with Alice, but nonetheless she go along with Alice's decision.

In another example:

Alice was looking at the week's schedule to try and find spots that aides may be available. Alice was again out of quality (reliable/on time/responsive) aides to fill a last minute weekend-long client request. She suggests to Jenn that they use Stephanie.

Jenn: "Stephanie is a scuzzball. She would sell her mother for a quarter if she could."

Alice: "Stephanie's free."

Jenn: "I would rather gouge my eyes out than give her more hours."

Alice: "Jenn, we don't want to go down that path. We don't have anyone else if we get those cases." (Referring to two clients they're waiting to hear back from who were confirming their own weekend needs.)

Jenn: "I know, and I would do it, but it doesn't make me feel warm and fuzzy at night...And just for the record, I'll say it again, Stephanie is a scuzzball."

The employees that Alice decided to fill these jobs with can be considered lower quality, caused organizational issues and concerns in the past, or may be considered a selfish person (that offended Jenn's personal interests) resulting in potentially less than optimal client care, but they did not pose any eminent danger to a client. These aides were essentially put on the bottom of the home health aide list of usable employees. With limited resources, it was sometimes the case that Alice needed to reach to the bottom. And if the aide had her own car, then Alice could make a strong practical case that ElderCare could fill a clients' request. In this respect, Alice's shades-of-grey logic led her to conclude that during times of routine growth, compromising quality was acceptable. However, according to Jenn's black-or-white decision-making process, these aides were not trustworthy, could not follow directions, or were simply selfish people that could not provide the type of quality care that Jenn believed was appropriate. Jenn did not seem to prescribe to the belief that growth should be sought simply by reacting to a client's demands and that ElderCare should not turn down any new business. Instead, she believed that new business could be turned town if it was not fulfilling ElderCare's ostensive goal. On this matter, she was unwilling to compromise on quality. The result

was disconcerting discussions by Alice and the introduction of cracks into the collaborative small group culture that was established at ElderCare during routine business culture.

Do You Even Know Your Employees?

On one regularly scheduled Tuesday morning meeting, Alice happened to be out of the office. While Jenn, James (the consultant), and I waited for the nurse to arrive, Jenn relayed a frustration to us. She said that, “we’re placing aides that Alice never met before.” She said that recently when they have people come in for interviews, Jenn says that Alice doesn’t speak to them. “She just says, ‘If they have all their paperwork and they have a car, hire them’...She used to sit down with every new aide.” The consultant said, “I don’t blame her...” for not wanting to go through the hiring process, but then followed up with “That’s bad...she should know better.”

Jenn’s concern stems from her sense that the meaning of Alice’s engagement with the aides is changing during this time of growth. Whereas once Alice had a high level of knowledge about each of her aides and assessed them prior to bringing them into the organization, she now seems to only care if they’re legally allowed to work and have their own transportation to get to the client. Although this is not problematic in itself if other managers assume greater responsibility in the hiring of new aides, Jenn seemed uncomfortable assuming this duty on her own. This change seemed to unsettle the organizational dynamics—whereas all staff were familiar with the aides during routine business performance, now collaborative decisions could not be made because of Alice’s

inattention to new hires. These destabilizing events led Jenn to begin to question ElderCare's commitments to its clients.

However, the consultant made the comment that he doesn't "blame Alice" for not interviewing the clients because he has said in the past how frustrating it is to deal with gathering the necessary paperwork and credentials of health aides. Moreover, James has pressed Alice to act "like a leader of a large organization" rather than dealing with some of the "daily work that others can handle" as he put it. I assume that he feels that Alice should not spend her time on work—such as interviewing—that he believes should be the responsibility of the office staff. He begins to develop meaning for Alice's altered activities as appropriate now that the organization is operating effectively and undergoing periodic growth. He believes an appropriate growth performance is for Alice to remove herself from some of the "mundane" office work. Nonetheless, he does concede that it is important for the owner to have at the very least, a conversation with a new hire to provide her own assessment and judgment of the aides' abilities to work in the homes of certain clients. Thus, he does not provide Jenn with a reasonable understanding of Alice's decision not to interview new hires. Instead, Jenn is left to question the changing role of the firm's owner and the group's relations to each other during routine growth performances.

"Shuttl[ing] Aides Around"—Being Tasked with Taxi Driving

Finding qualified home health aides with experience has been a difficult task from the firm's start. But finding high quality aides that are responsible enough to show up to work on time, and who can provide their own transportation has been an extraordinary

undertaking. As a result, when potential new clients contact the office, since I began collecting field notes, employees have often been in a bind to find a qualified, responsible aide with his or her own transportation to fill positions. The issue of transportation has perhaps been the single most difficult issue to overcome for the firm. About eight months into my field research, ElderCare experienced a spike in clients. In a bind, Alice simply needed more home health aides. She wound up hiring and filling jobs with aides that did not have their own form of transportation. Many of the home health aides ElderCare employs cannot afford to own their vehicles, and public transportation in ElderCare's county is "a nightmare" as Alice puts it. Because most trains and buses in the suburban town leaves aides more than two miles away from clients' homes, Alice was paying hundreds of dollars each week on taxis.

To try and cut this expense, Alice thought she could hire a driver for ElderCare, but found that livery laws were prohibitive and bringing on a driver would not be cost effective. As a result, Alice, Jenn, the nurse, and even myself drove aides from train stops to their final destinations. Alice explained that "Jenn has to leave the office and drive people, I have to drive people...and if we don't, I can't afford to spend like \$500 a week on taxis." Of course, Alice could have avoided hiring aides who could not determine their own rides or possess means of transportation to clients' homes—a comment that Jenn aggravatingly made on a daily basis. "Who the hell tells an employee that if they can't get to work, the boss will give you a ride? I've never heard of this! It's ridiculous!" Alice was well aware of everyone's displeasure of acting as taxi drivers.

The following exchange, taken from my field notes, highlights the tensions that develop over the taxiing of home health aides during routine growth performance:

One weekly meeting Alice was not able to attend because she was driving an aide around. The firm's consultant, James said that she needs to "stop doing that" and "she needs to work on recruiting now—she needs to be in the office doing things here" instead of wasting her time driving aides around... Jenn just nodded during his talk, somewhat frustrated by James. It was clear to everyone that Alice was putting stress on herself and her office staff by trying to cut taxi costs, instead of seeking out qualified home health aides who could find their own means to get to work, and see herself as the organization's leader rather than filling in the current organizational gaps.

Jenn added that driving aides around snowballs into additional issues. Once Alice drives aides around, she then comes back to the office disgruntled and moody (because she was stuck in traffic, or had a long wait to get an aide because she missed her train, or because there was confusion about the pickup location). Jenn said that she needs to talk to her about things that transpired when she was out of the office, but Alice "says that she 'doesn't want to hear it.'" Instead, Alice gets back to the office from these runs, and she's "baked" according to Jenn. Jenn says that when she tries to then ask her critical office questions, "she barks."

The consultant said that she doesn't bark, "she shrieks." We all laugh.

Despite the attempts at levity of this issue by joking about Alice's physical fatigue and emotional response upon returning from driving aides around, the reorganization of resources at ElderCare around growth has caused ongoing conflicts. Jenn has near daily concern for clients' well being, as well as resentment for Alice because of her avoidance of office issues that Jenn believes are important for her to deal with in a timely manner. Jenn also disdains having to personally drive aides to clients' homes, and more generally disagrees that any employee should be given the choice to get what amounts to a free ride to work. The consultant emphasizes that, in order for ElderCare to grow, Alice should better organize her time and resources. His prescriptive solution is that growth will come from Alice's focus on recruiting better employees as well as more clients, rather than chauffeuring home health aides around town. The consultant emphasizes that there's greater long-term benefit for Alice to spend money on taxis now, and use Jenn and her own time focused on work that will productively grow the business, rather than "save a few dollars today," as he put it. More importantly, the consultant privately told me that

Alice is “hurting the morale of all the office workers” who have to “shuttle aides around.” In fact, one part-time nurse complained to me that she “didn’t needed 20 years of nursing experience to drive people to work.”

Jenn’s near daily complaints about taxiing aides was made in a strategic effort to aggregate interests. Even though Jenn did not get along (personality-wise) with the part time nurse, she solicited the nurse’s opinion on driving aides several times. She equally disliked the task, and as quoted above, positioned her displeasure by expressing that her identity as a nurse was affected by this ongoing taxiing task. Jenn also effectively networked to outliers, including James and myself, convincing both of us to side with her on the taxiing issue. James’s argument was situated in his belief that Alice should not drive aides around (even if he did not suggest Jenn should also stop that practice as well), it did seem that James’ opinions on the issue were aligning with Jenn’s. Eventually Jenn also asked me to keep track of daily taxi expenses and trips that we all made driving aides so that a “true reality of driving costs and be figured out” as Jenn put it. Jenn asked that I keep this Excel file on my computer and to not share it with Alice until Jenn was ready. In this way, it seemed, Jenn was collecting both subjective interests about driving aides around, as well as objective costs (in terms of time and financial expense) to taxi aides, in an effort to challenge Alice’s original strategy during routine growth performance about the need to drive aides to cut expenses.

Jenn effectively managed this work as an institutional entrepreneur during unsettled periods of growth at ElderCare, inducing the feedback and implicit cooperation of all staff members that taxiing was not ElderCare employees’ responsibility. In fact, this challenge proved mostly successful (even without the objective cost compilation,

which I came to believe was more of a back-up ammunition if Jenn's pleas about not wanting to drive were not heeded by Alice). About a month after Jenn's complaint to James and myself, Jenn and the nurse were no longer asked to drive aides around, and Alice dramatically decreased the number of aides she drove. In her effort, Jenn helped to manage work identities and reassert what she believed was the proper work responsibility of the office staff—that of accomplishing the organization's primary goal of helping to provide compassionate care, and not prioritizing cost-savings behaviors.

Summary of ElderCare Growth Performance

Alice's re-organization of priorities and resources around growth emphasized taking on all new client jobs, filling those jobs with any available aide (often prioritizing those aides with their own transportation, rather than aides with the greatest expertise to match clients' needs), and minimizing costs by transporting aides to jobs. The result of this shift led to concern among employees about the quality of care offered to some clients, and anger by employees to perform tasks they felt could simply be outsourced (like taxiing). Alice's general rationale for this strategy was that without bringing in more revenue, ElderCare would not be able to stay in business, let alone grow—even if that meant that occasionally they would compromise, at least in the short term, in fully accomplishing their ostensive goal of providing compassionate care.

Alice's focus on the short-term cost saving solutions during times of routine growth resulted in disruptions of the routine business operations of collaboration. Although Alice has the authority to order her staff to complete tasks that they might not want to do, this is only a short-term resolution. Alice fails to induce cooperation through the development of meaningful reasons that the ElderCare staff would come to

understand as appropriate. Instead, Alice's limited social skills resulted in continued destabilization during routine growth. Jenn became a challenger to Alice's growth aims, and uses her own social skills and strategic tactics in developing a coalition of employees against the growth performance operations Alice tries to institute. Importantly, the transformation of resources, relationships, and decision-making during growth led some employees to question their work identities and their contributions to the organization. Such discomfort helped to bolster support for Jenn's successful challenge to some of the organization's changes during routine growth performance.

Thorny Rose

Primary Goal: *Beautiful arrangements*

Growth Strategy: Always be available for every client and Focus on big ticket items

Performance:

Julian - "If a customer buys one rose today, you might wind up doing their wedding down the road."

Nicholas - "I don't want to be here everyday from morning 'til night. What's the big picture here. We should use this place's potential and figure out all the things we can sell."

Critical Components:

1. Thorny Rose's 80-year-old existence has enable the third generation to learn the many "tricks of the trade" of the industry, in addition to establishing themselves as a well-known florist in the county. However, the lack of organizational leadership has led to two disparate growth strategies that are enacted simultaneously, contributing to the tension and conflict that is already experienced at the firm.

2. Julian argues that Thorny Rose's differentiator among other businesses in the industry is its ability to capture the hearts of all its clients through high levels of customer service. I believe this work identity emotionally connects Julian to his father's and grandfather's work strategies, blinding him to other growth opportunities.

3. In contrast, Nicholas and Lilia believe that Thorny Rose should capitalize on its well-known position in the community and focus on "big ticket items" such as its growing wholesale work and wedding business. These avenues of growth provide for more control over work schedule and autonomy. While they acknowledge that funeral work makes up a large part of their retail sales, Nicholas believes that word of mouth and recommendations from funeral homes will continue bringing in those clients, and catering to small orders today is not necessary to bring in bigger business in the future.

4. Both Nicholas and Lilia find their work identity not as floral designers, but as operators of an established, successful, competitive floral business that is an institution in the community. Thus, they develop meanings around a growth strategy that provides them the ability to find congruence between their identity and their work.

5. Different strategic growth performances increase organizational tension and struggles for use of limited human capital and other resources. Although Nicholas and Lilia could band together because of their shared mutual interests, both fail to bring forth a sense of empathy in an effort to determine how to work together to help create a growth strategy that all the siblings could be on board with.

6. Although Julian also fails to induce cooperation at the for his strategic growth aims, he seems to harness some level of social skill and uses several strategic tactics to achieve his goals, including: asking for more and settling for less, maintaining selflessness, and framing action.

Differing Perspectives for Growth

Julian repeatedly told me that, “our business is all customer service. That’s what we offer here.” To differentiate Thorny Rose from other florists, as well as from indirect competition the siblings increasingly spoke about as viable competitors (including supermarket florists and flowers sold at Trader Joe’s, Whole Foods, and even gas stations), Julian believed that the organization’s ostensive goal of providing beautiful arrangements, delivered through a routine business performance of whatever needs to get done, would provide customers an optimal level of customer service. If all the siblings took responsibility for the variety of things that needed to be accomplished in the shop, then all siblings could be responsive to customers needs. While the siblings were very effective sales people and objectively provide high quality customer service to most clients, there were many things that Julian hoped that his siblings would take responsibility for to provide a superior level of service to differentiate themselves from the competition and continue to grow. However, Julian’s philosophy about this growth strategy was not one that was shared by his siblings.

Julian told me that since his grandfather opened the store, they haven't closed. This seemed rather remarkable, and the other siblings confirmed this statement. The only two days they closed was for their grandfather's and their father's funerals. But Julian added that for his father's funeral they actually were open in the morning and Julian had some assistance from an employee who closed up after them. Although this was shared knowledge among the siblings, only Julian believed that this was an appropriate way of continuing to operate the business. Julian suggested that buying flowers was typically a spontaneous purchase and customers did not check store hours in advance of their purchases. Thus, Julian felt that it was important that Thorny Rose keep long hours, always help customers that came through the door even as the shop was closing, and stay open seven days a week and on all major holidays.

On the other hand, the other siblings suggested that their grandfather kept such long hours because he was starting a new business and “that’s what all new business owners need to do” (according to Lilia), and their father kept long hours “because he was selfish and wanted money” (according to Nicholas). The other siblings believed that they should have a better balance between work and their social and personal lives. They believed that rather than sticking to similar growth strategies that had historically guided the organization’s growth, they should instead, as Lilia suggested, “capitalize on our position in the community, our abilities [skill at making arrangements], and our connections to our suppliers” to build Thorny Rose into a different kind of business—one that focused on offerings to clients that provide greater single sale revenue. For the other siblings, this meant concentrating efforts on increasing their growing wedding business, and put more energy into expanding their wholesale offerings.

Julian's Perspective – Always Be Available to Everyone

Today's Single Rose Purchase is Tomorrow's Custom Funeral Piece

Julian prided himself in delivering quality customer service to every customer who walked through the door, no matter how much they purchased. He was particularly sensitive to the many emotionally charged reasons clients may be making floral purchases. The florist was near several large graveyards, and graveyard managers as well as the local funeral homes would often recommend the Thorny Rose. As a result, the florist would frequently get clients who were coming in to purchase a small bouquet, or even a single flower, to bring to a loved one's gravesite. Thus, the appearance of someone purchasing a single rose for \$3.50, and the labor it takes to put together some fillers of green and baby's breath and wrap it in plastic, as well as offer a free card (that was offered with any flower purchase) seemed like a waste of time considering how much the store made on this single purchase. However, a mother may be purchasing a rose to bring to her son's grave.

It was often asked what occasion the flowers were being purchased for—in the case of a gravesite, Julian would always say, “my condolences for your loss” and then follow up with a story about his father's death, or a customer in the area who had a family member who recently died, or some story so he could connect with the customer. He explicitly told me that he shares these stories to be empathetic, but also because he has noticed that people like to share their grief, as well as remember their loved one through talking about them. Julian explicitly told me that during these times of connection, he believed that customers would remember Thorny Rose and consider them for future purchases. For example, a middle-aged man purchased a small \$18

arrangement and chatted for more than 10 minutes with Julian. After he left, Julian said to me: “Perhaps this guy is visiting his mom in the hospital today, but in a few months his daughter might need flowers for her wedding.” Overhearing this comment, Nicholas asked: “Did he tell you his daughter is getting married?”

Julian: “No. He didn’t even say he had a daughter.”

Nicholas: “Great use of your time.”

Julian: “Nicholas, you just never know. You just don’t know.”

Other family members would tease or sometimes chastise Julian for the long duration of time he spends with customers—especially when there was other arrangements that needed to be made. Nonetheless, Julian was very insistent about providing high levels of intimate customer service for each client. He would say, “you never know why a customer has come here until you talk with them.... We want them to remember us. As my father would say, you could turn that \$5 rose into a \$500 funeral piece.” Julian’s point was simply that by providing high levels of customer service for everyone, those clients will remember the Thorny Rose when they have larger events, whether they be happy or sad occasions.

This simple strategic growth approach sometimes caused fights among the siblings. As I previously noted, if a sibling was not actively engaged in a task, and instead seemed to be “just chatting,” he or she would be told to “stop standing around” (usually by Nicholas). Thus, during long conversations Julian would have with clients, Nicholas would frequently comment about how he was “wasting his time.” And when Lilia would speak with clients for extended periods of time while making floral arrangements, she would similarly be “scolded.” In response, I heard her say on multiple occasions that “This is how Julian works with customers, isn’t that what we do here?” These confused

messages and meanings unsettled the group dynamics of what were considered appropriate interactions with clients.

Ready-Made Items for Sale – The Importance of “Stupid Little Arrangements”

Julian re-emphasized to me the importance of creating prepared items to have in the store for people to just come in and pick up. This included everything from small pre-made arrangements to Styrofoam crosses with silk flowers embedded in them for graveyard displays. He said that such preparation was critical on extraordinarily busy holidays, like Mother’s Day, but it was also critical for more minor holidays like Easter and even Administrator’s Assistant Day to help the florist make “easy money.” For example, on Easter, there were few pre-made items of any sort, yet Thorny Rose typically sold a variety of items for customers who were visiting graveyards that day. After telling his family members for several days prior to Easter to make gravesite pieces (typically Styrofoam wreaths or crosses that were spray-painted different “Easter colors” and sold plain or with silk flowers), he started making them himself. However, this task took him away from the work of making large funeral arrangements, of which several came in at one time.

When Nicholas and Lilia realized Julian was outside making these gravesite pieces, they “scolded” him for focusing on “stupid little arrangements” instead of helping out with “the big stuff” that Nicholas and Lilia deemed as more critical. After Julian retorted that nothing’s ready for Easter, he decided to give me the task of creating these arrangements—which was not nearly as easy as it looked. The first step was to carefully spray paint the Styrofoam—if too little was sprayed, the color would not appear; if too

much was sprayed the paint would eat away at the foam and distort the object. I destroyed several Styrofoam pieces and Julian had to touch up a few that I did not properly paint. And once it dried, I had to determine how best to arrange the flowers on these items (based on examples Julian had just completed).

After the Easter holiday, Julian explained to me his belief about the importance of having things ready in advance. He said that for Easter, if I didn't make "those Styrofoam things," that he said he sold out of, "then we wouldn't have made....[he started calculating in his head how many I made and how much each cost (\$19.95) and I made 15]...\$300." Without those items, "it's like we're just losing money...[I]f my family's not listening to me about what needs to get done, I'm not going to just take care of it any more." Although Julian appears to be trying to teach his family a lesson about proper customer service and preparing items in order for the firm to grow, this lesson falls on dead ears. He is not able to employ any strategic tactics to induce cooperation of his siblings to convince them to aid in this sort of preparation for easy business growth. It seems that his strategy was to ask for more and settle for less, but this tactic also seemed to fail. Instead, he simply instructed me to take over the task, which I complied with because I was willing to accept his direct authority.

Death Waits for No One

The florist is now open every day of the year, despite calls from all other family members to close the store one day during the week, on some major holidays (such as Christmas) and on days that require substantial assistance from all staff members to complete a specific job—for example, a wedding that required more than 36 working hours for a staff of five to put together. Julian said that he works all holidays except for

July 4th, when he goes to his friend's place for a barbeque. When I asked why they never close on holidays, he said, "you know what they say, 'Death waits for no one.' And if the one time someone needs us because a family member passed, and that day we're closed, then that's the experience they have with us."

Julian felt very strongly that it was important for the florist to provide premium customer service in order for the business to grow. This meant always being available for customers. When family members would challenge him on this point, he would frequently come back with: "As my father would say, you never know what tomorrow will bring." To me, Julian's consistent symbolic use of his father's idioms to explain his belief about this strategy for growth suggested that Julian's work identity was strongly rooted in his connection with his father. Compared to his siblings, Julian spent the most time working in the shop with his father (and grandfather), and it may be why Julian's siblings do not necessarily share the same sentiments about a growth strategy being tied to customer service and to "never closing the store."

Although Julian insisted on organizing work schedules around the need to be available to customers at all times, this resistance was mostly nagging banter. When I questioned Nicholas and Lilia about Julian's decision to stay open every day of the year, they capitulated and said that it is probably the best for business. Nicholas told me that there have been quite a few customers that come in on a Sunday afternoon and tell us that they're thankful that we're open because they needed to pick up flowers for an event that day. Thus, despite family grumblings and chastising, organizing the store's growth around accommodating customers seemed to be acceptable to Nicholas and Lilia. Julian's constant framing of his rationale for providing superior customer service, and his

discussion of these activities by maintaining selflessness, was generally accepted as a proper way to organize during routine times of growth, even if it did not provide the autonomy and flexible work other siblings wanted.

Nicholas and Lilia's Perspective – Focus on Big Ticket Items

Operation: Geranium

Nicholas has said numerous times that his father and his grandfather both emphasized the importance of diversification. What this meant for Nicholas is a focus on developing a growing wholesale branch of the Thorny Rose. Nicholas told me that he likes “working on bigger projects—on the wholesale stuff. Working with vendors developing new relationships.” It became clear to me that the decision to work on the wholesale business was primarily a desire that Nicholas had to work on components of the business other than daily operations and routine customer care. “If we have the capacity to do these sorts of projects [i.e. wholesale work] why would I toil all day waiting for someone to wander in the front door. We can do more than that.” Nicholas made it very clear that his strategy to help grow Thorny Rose was a focus on developing and expanding the wholesale business, and his preference was to minimize the time he spent with daily customer interactions.

Last week Nicholas handled stripping palms and making crosses for Palm Sunday. Julian told me that last year was the first year they made palms themselves. This involved purchasing a table saw to cut wood to make a stake-cross, as well as the purchase of multiple high-powered staplers which are used to staple the stripped and folded palm to the wooden cross. Thorny Rose sells these at a wholesale price of \$8.

Julian said that last year they just about broke even—between the purchase of the new equipment to make the palms, and going through the “learning curve costs,” as Nicholas put it, associated with spending time on how to best fold, staple, and finish each palm. He added that, “we saw how other people made them [at other florists] and copied that...but it took us some time.”

Julian told me that some people do not want to do wholesale business because the profit margins are low and can cause a lot of headaches. Nicholas made a similar argument and referenced a florist owner down the street who said that he would not want to do wholesale accounts because “it’s not worth the aggravation.” Much of the “aggravation” this florist spoke about was the intensity of labor required to produce these items for wholesale—which necessitated very fast physical production in order to minimize labor costs because the marginal costs of wholesale items were so low.

This week in the store, Nicholas was focused on arranging geraniums for several local graveyards. These geraniums would go on tombstones for Easter. We had an order of 455 for one cemetery, an order for 535 for another, and several orders of fewer than 100. Throughout the day Nicholas filled me in on some details of what he referenced as the, “geranium operation we have going on in the back.” Nicholas said that he bought the potted geraniums for \$2.50 each, then he bought small wicker baskets for about 50 cents each, then the Kid and an extra employee the Kid recommended came to help make hundreds of bows last week, each costing a few cents. The bows were wrapped with green wire, and put into the potted plants, and the pots put into the wicker baskets and topped with a dried, decorative grass mulch to cover the soil. He said that they sell these to the cemeteries for \$6.50 and the cemeteries sell them to customers for \$8.50. He said

that they don't make very much individually on these plants, but if we "make them fast enough, then we can do okay," he said smiling. And throughout the day, Julian was outside with the Kid and another Hispanic guy who previously helped to make bows. Nicholas shouted demands and directions at these individuals all day long. Often we would hear him tell them to "move faster!" stop being "so sloppy!" or more often it was, "what did I tell you to do?! So why are you not doing it! Are you trying to fool around here?!"

Most of the day I was working inside the store with Julian, who would sometimes snicker when Nicholas sounded particularly irritated. Tyler would sometimes come over to us and comment: "Oh my god, do you hear Nicholas is yelling" as she would point outside. "I'm glad I'm not out there," and chuckled. Julian added, "you know, we think sometimes it's crazy how Nicholas yells at the workers to get them to do their job, but when we make just a few bucks on each of these, you can understand why." The work of the "geranium operation" and last week's "palm operation" and other wholesale projects were part of Nicholas's domain that he chose to develop as a growth strategy. Even though there was no formal strategic planning prior to production of these wholesale items, Nicholas clearly intended these projects as multi-year endeavors.

Even though Nicholas's strategy for growth by developing Thorny Rose's wholesale business brings in immediate revenue and continues to diversify its business offerings, these activities have proved to be a distraction for Nicholas and others from the daily operations of the store. Moreover, the amount of revenue generated from these wholesale endeavors is low, given the amount of planning and intensity of labor required to fill the orders. Instead, Julian suggests that the energy and planning may be better used

on creating prepared floral pieces, silk arrangements, painted Styrofoam crosses, and other pre-made arrangements for regular walk-in customers. In fact, while Julian supports Nicholas's efforts to expand the business, he often says that he wishes that his family "would worry more about some of the other things that need to get done in this place, and not just their own side projects." Julian frames Nicholas's action so that Julian himself finds the activities acceptable. Nicholas, however, makes few attempts to induce cooperation or understanding of the importance of such growth activities. Instead, he takes on the task of the wholesale business on his own without help from his siblings.

A Wedding Story

Although Thorny Rose has worked with brides and wedding parties for several years, it has only been recently that Lilia decided to increasingly focus on wedding customers. Lilia told me that part of the reason she decided to spend more time developing the bridal business and move away from working at the store on a daily basis was so that she could be more available for her children. But she also told me that the conflicts with her siblings have also led her to want to be away from the store more. By removing herself from many of the daily operations, she believed she would be less involved in disputes.

When I asked Julian and Nicholas how Lilia became the primary coordinator of the wedding business, they both told me that she just took on that responsibility, just as Nicholas took on the wholesale responsibility because, as he said, "I enjoyed it." Given the lack of clear leadership in the organization, outside of the routine crisis performance, it was not surprising that siblings with initiative would develop a business strategy of their own. In turn, when a customer would come into the shop inquiring about weddings,

any one of us would show them a book of photographs of weddings that the florist had done (although this book, in my opinion, was rather sparse especially considering the breadth of weddings the florist actually handled). However, we encouraged customers to set up an appointment with Lilia. Since Lilia's schedule at the shop was irregular, I would give Lilia a call on her cell phone when a customer was interested in making an appointment for a wedding consultation to see what her availability was.

When it came to coordinating weddings, Lilia could handle very small weddings with total costs under \$750 on her own—of which the florist had quite a few. However, anything larger than a wedding involving bridal and bridesmaids bouquets, boutonnieres, and a few simple centerpieces required Lilia to coordinate assistance from the Kid as well as from other siblings—taking his time away from other work in the shop that Julian or Nicholas believed was sometimes “more important than Lilia's wedding stuff...[I]f she just stayed a little later, she could do this on her own” as Nicholas explained to me. Lilia would often speak with Julian or Nicholas several days prior to a wedding to ask if she could use the Kid for a day or two. She would also solicit Tyler to help with wedding preparation. And on wedding days, Lilia would often need at least one other person to help her make deliveries of those wedding items—requiring the Kid or a family member to be out of the store for at least an hour or more, depending on the size of the wedding. All these coordinating efforts were never done in a systematic way and often resulted in some seething among the siblings, especially on busy Saturdays when Lilia would request the assistance of the Kid or another siblings.

In addition to meeting brides, developing bids, and the physical work of crafting arrangements and making the deliveries, Lilia would often have to order flowers and

wedding accessories that the store typically does not order for regular sale. Although Lilia would often order flowers from vendors which the Thorny Rose regularly used, Lilia would often order her wedding flowers without checking to determine what flowers the store needed. In these situations, Julian would get very infuriated in a way that was out of character for him. On one occasion he said to Lilia: “Why wouldn’t you check what else we needed?! Lilia, I have a list of things here to check. Why didn’t you check?” To which Lilia apologized, but added that she was calling the vendor to check if they even had the flowers she needed, and when she determined they had them in stock, she just went forward with the order. The issue here is that vendors begin immediately filling orders when they receive a call to ensure the product is delivered the very next day. If an order is already compiled and loaded onto a truck, then additional shipping costs are incurred when a new order is placed. However, what bothers Julian more about this situation than shipping costs is that it seemed that Lilia organized her activities exclusively around working for her wedding clients’ needs to the exclusion of any other store needs. When I questioned Julian later about his reaction to her, he said that if she was already placing a flower order, “she should place the order for the entire shop. Not just *her* wedding.”

In addition to the activities of processing and coordinating the wedding itself, Lilia needed to write up quotes for her customers to approve, and be in frequent email contact with her clients. As a result, she spent a considerable amount of time at the computer. Although organizing her time and responsibilities around these activities was necessary to complete wedding tasks, she would often be chastised by Nicholas, Tyler and Julian if she asked someone else to pick up a ringing phone if she was working on a

quote, or asking someone else to assist a customer who walked in if she was working on a small bouquet for a wedding client.

Criticism by the other family members suggested that they resented the fact that Lilia prioritized “her wedding work” (as they would refer to it), over the “work required in the store,” as Julian always said. Lilia would typically fight back, supporting her decisions to focus on wedding work by arguing that she was doing most of the work herself, or that she was planning on being in the shop late that night and early in the morning preparing, or that she had not “asked anyone here for help yet, so give me a break.” There was a lot of exasperation she seemed to feel around her desire to focus on her wedding clients.

However, Lilia did not seem to make an effort to induce sympathy or cooperation from her siblings. Instead, she primarily sought to defend herself and her actions when focusing on the wedding work. I believe part of the reason why all siblings gave her “a hard time” (as I wrote in my field notes) when she worked on weddings was because she unknowingly seemed to frame her actions as selfish. Although she would argue that the wedding work brought in significant money to the busy and increased Thorny Roses’ “profile beyond the immediate community,” her decision to ask other siblings to handle immediate work of the store, even when she could have assisted (whether helping a client, answering the phone, or order flowers needed for the shop) led the other siblings to view her activities as a strategic growth effort that only seemed to benefit Lilia. This unsettling activity seemed to significantly violate the routine business operations at Thorny Rose of doing whatever needs to get done, leading even Julian uncharacteristically to yell at Lilia. I found over time that the siblings increasingly came to

see Lilia as self-serving. Her failure to employ any strategic tactics to garner support for her work and consider how she could better situate her work within the store's ostensive goals and routine business performance, led to increased conflicts. Even though Lilia's intentions on focusing on wedding work were initially to minimize conflict, it seemed to result in the opposite action.

Summary of Thorny Rose Growth Performance

Organizing for growth meant different things the siblings at Thorny Rose. For Julian it meant focusing on the core business and generating more repeat customers through high level of quality customer service. For Nicholas, it meant increasing focus on his desire to work on what he enjoyed, large-scale wholesale work. And for Lilia, it meant focusing on an area of the business that provided her autonomy from the daily business routines as well as greater control over the time she needed to spend at the shop. All these areas of growth may prove important to the vitality of the Thorny Rose in the long run. However, in the short term, these silo activities seem to cause increased tension in the business because it takes employees' time and attention away from the many daily activities required for regular store operations.

Nicholas's and Lilia's routine growth performances at the Thorny Rose were seen as individualistic endeavors. Although they both suggested that their work contributed to the store's bottom line, it was evident that their preference for wholesale and wedding work, respectively, led them to deprioritize general work for the store, unsettling the group. Although Julian's growth performances may not necessarily be best for the siblings' desire for work-life balance and autonomy, and while it is also unknown how often a single rose purchase turns into a future flower orders for weddings or funerals,

Julian was successful at framing his efforts as important for the store, rather than a selfish undertaking. Despite such recognition by Nicholas and Lilia, Julian was not successful in inducing cooperation from his siblings for this growth strategy. They challenged Julian's growth strategy whenever possible—even closing up the store early on several occasions when Julian was not around. Julian was able to maintain the meaning of his growth strategy, but it did not translate into consistent group action.

On the other hand, neither Nicholas nor Lilia sought to frame their activities as selfless. Instead, both of them seemed to profess their growth strategies as individualistic efforts. As a result of these divergent interests and disparate meanings, routine growth performances perpetuated unease and anger among the family members at the Thorny Rose. Claims for authority over additional business resources, notably scarce labor resources, fueled additional aggravation. Increasingly disparate meanings of work unsettled the bonds of the working relationship between the siblings. In fact, several months after I discontinued data collection, Nicholas took an “extended vacation” from the store because, according to one sibling, “he said he felt underappreciated.” No doubt Nicholas's own poor social skills and failure to create meaning among the group, for the work that he considered critical for growth wound up alienating him from Thorny Rose.

Routine Growth Performance Conclusion

Generating order during routine growth performance proved challenging for all the small firms studied in this dissertation. Previous research suggests that the single most important determinant of overall attitude toward growth (consistent across a variety of research samples, industries, and age groups) was concern for the effect of growth on

organizational culture and employee job satisfaction (Wiklund et al. 2003). Given this concern, it would seem that organizational leaders would consider how growth strategies might transform meaning making among employees in their organizations. However, I did not record firm leaders expressing concern for this. It may very well be a consequence of leaders' lack of strategic planning itself that resulted in the absence of demonstrative concern for their firm's culture—if leaders had formal plans in place, then perhaps they would consider how the implementation of a strategy for growth would affect their firm's culture. However, consistent with prior literature, none of the small firms in this study had formal strategic plans. Instead, recurrent patterns of interactions that created organizational stability through a routine business performance were disrupted periodically by growth performances as business opportunities became available.

Intermittent times of growth in each firm were evident to all firm actors because decision-making seemed to be altered from routine business operations. Shared cultural meanings develop over time and bind actors of small groups. When a disruption to that ongoing meaning making process occurs, firm actors are attuned to such inconsistencies. Such disruptions may not be cause for concern if actors have the opportunity to properly negotiate the joint construction of meaning through negotiations. However, since strategic decisions about organizational growth originate from firm members with the greatest source of power and resources (i.e. firm leaders), small firm leaders (at least in this study) seemed to offer little time for group negotiations and discussions of firm growth. Moreover, because formal planning did not take place, growth performances often took place as opportunities for growth became available, leaving little time for

groups to develop any sense of shared understanding of how to react. As a consequence, decisions made by firm leaders resulted in actors with lower social status feeling out of sorts with organizational activities, unsettling group cohesiveness.

One way to understand small businesses growth through a cultural perspective is to consider firm actors' tactics to create new meanings and persuade others to buy into those meanings and cooperate when pursuing growth. Fligstein's notion of social skill, the ability to induce cooperation in others, and an actor's knowledge of employing certain strategic tactics to persuade others to support one's cause was useful to understanding small groups' responses during these destabilizing times. Although some firm leaders attempted to create meaning to reaffirm group cohesiveness, most failed to develop an appropriate understanding of growth strategies. In some instances, lower status group members took initiative as "institutional entrepreneurs" and challenged leaders' routine growth performance activities by soliciting their own support from other group members. These ongoing struggles for constructing meaning, especially during times of unsettled group dynamics, demonstrate the fragility of small firms and the necessity to ensure a cohesive small group culture.

One of the critical reasons why disruptions to taken-for-granted meanings of work within small firms is so important, is because actor's work identities are created through social interactions among group members. According to Fine (2012:163), "Identity is fundamentally interpersonal to the extent that it is based on groups to which the actor holds loyalty." When group interactions fail to support actors' ongoing sense of self within an organization, than loyalty to that organization may falter. Thus, when firm actors find leaders making decisions during routine growth performances that seem

inappropriate in relation to previously held conceptions of group operations, group cohesiveness can become unhinged. Actors may choose to form smaller factions within the organization (as I was personally a part of at AeroGears, along with Keith and Fred, and that Jenn created at ElderCare), or leave the organization entirely (as was the case with Nicholas at Thorny Rose and Aiko at Rolling Hills) when one's sense of identity is not reaffirmed.

What routine growth performances often meant for these small firms was risk-taking behavior that often ran counter to routine business operations and sometimes endangered the organization's ostensive goals. For example, at ElderCare, the organization's biggest fear was a wandering dementia patient. To carefully prevent this from occurring during routine business operations, staff members would collaborate and take time to match appropriate aides to clients. However, during times of routine growth performance, Alice opted to place "problem aides" and new hires that she had not yet met into client homes. At AeroGears, although the firm's biggest fear was a plane falling out of the sky with their parts in it, Leo continued to place and win bids for new parts, taxing the floor employees (and the equipment) and increasing the likelihood of poorly constructed pieces.

Growth ambitions also threatened firms' abilities to effectively focus on ostensive goals and increased tension between leaders and lower status group members. At Rolling Hills, Penelope's aim to diversify items available for purchase for her current customers, and spending time on renting out her empty rooms, increasingly alienated her volunteers, especially her most effective farm hand, Aiko. At Thorny Rose, Nicholas increasingly focused his attention on developing the company's wholesale business instead of working

closely with retail clients. Lilia significantly reduced her hours at Thorny Rose, and while there, tried limiting her time spent with customers and instead focused on the wedding working. Both Nicholas and Lilia wound up adding to the tension in the firm because of the increasing strain they imposed on the few human capital resources available while also failing to employ any social skills to induce cooperation of their siblings. During these times of growth performance, attention to customers declined, and completing the ostensive task of creating beautiful arrangements was primarily left to Julian, who was already responsible for much of the work of day-to-day operations of the store.

Destabilizing times of routine growth performances require actors with social skills to help induce cooperation among group members through shared meanings. Recognizing that the splintering of groups can occur during growth performances is critical to ensuring something is done about it. If prior ways of meaning making are not possible, and work identities shift out of line, small groups cultures can fall apart. Without resources to support small businesses, growth performances may in fact lead businesses to become failed businesses—not necessarily because of a poor growth strategy, but because of a failure to develop meanings through interactions among group members during growth performances resulting in decreased dedication to small firm activities.

It seemed to me that small business owners and leaders believed that employees would simply understand that in order for the business to thrive, “things can’t stay the same” as Alice at ElderCare put it. However, the leaders of the businesses in this dissertation lacked a proper understanding of what it means for an organization to change (i.e. that cultural transformations through ongoing interactions are required to maintain a

common sense of order and meaning). Guidance is required to enable employees to “get on board” with growth performances. Firm actors of lower status needed to be persuaded about the appropriateness of such changes by those firm actors who hold the power to make such strategic growth decisions.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and Practical Implications

In this dissertation I intended to demonstrate that small businesses are compelling sites of action, far from the mundane visions of the small mom and pop stores popularly characterized on the news. More importantly, through a cultural analysis of four small enterprising firms, I hope I provided new insights into how organizations generate order given limited formal processes and structures. Instead of producing formal systems of coordination, small enterprising businesses reenact cultural performances, based on shared meanings, beliefs, and appropriate forms of action. Findings from this study also shed light on how the ordering in each of these firms results in high levels of firm inefficiencies. The ways of operating are developed from shared histories, experiences, and ongoing meaning making, rather than through any sort of rational process of formalizing procedures, developing protocols for crisis management, or instituting explicit growth strategies.

This study positions itself in contrast to many academic researchers and practitioners who often treat small businesses as “little big businesses” (Welsh and White 1981) and emphasize the importance of small businesses’ creation of formal structures and rigid processes to promote stability. Practitioners and scholars perpetuate the “little big business” perspective to structure their research as well as their prescriptive recommendations for small firm stability, despite empirical evidence from scholars that demonstrate small businesses successfully operate with few formal structures. I believe that the idioculture framework employed in this research can be a useful tool for scholars pursuing research on entrepreneurial ventures, small growing businesses, family businesses, and team-based work in organizations.

Recognition of culture's significance in small business sustainability can also provide practical insights to help practitioners, including small business owners, consultants, and small business support and advocacy organizations such as local chambers of commerce and federal agencies like the U.S. Small Business Association, to more effectively work with small businesses. Small business owners and managers should recognize the significance of culture in generating order.

Theoretical Contribution

A single performance of culture cannot provide the relational flexibility and firm practices necessary for operating an entrepreneurial business. I argued that ostensive organizational goals, or firms' primary goals, guide what organizations aim to accomplish, but the enactment of that goal takes three distinct forms—a routine business performance, a routine crisis performance, and a routine growth performance. The routine business performance constitutes a form of relational equilibrium—a cultural performance based on common histories, experiences, and shared meaning making that provides firm members a satisfying work identity and sense of autonomy. Alternatives to this routine business performance transform small group interactions. Routine crisis and growth performances alter the relational dynamics of small groups and require an adjustment of organizational resources to enable small groups to respond to internal and external pressures. However, these changes do not arise spontaneously, but are rooted in small group histories and shared experiences. These histories provide members an understanding of how relationships can adjust during different performances, and also provide a basis for shared meaning making and stability during alternative performances.

The patterns of cultural performances that I found in each of my field sites contribute to an understanding of the dynamic nature of culture. Organizational researchers often discuss culture as static—in that an organization has a particular culture that becomes known to employees and then simply operates. Often times, this culture is described as being developed by leaders and managers in a top-down strategic process (Schein 1983). Moreover, organizational cultures are said to be used to manage employees' behaviors (Kunda 1992). However, an idioculture framework explicitly identifies culture as a bottom-up process. Microinstitutionalism identifies culture as a system of shared meaning making, beliefs, and values involve an incessantly negotiated and constantly re-enacted process among all firm actors. As described in this dissertation, employees came to share an understanding of firm meanings, which provide them with an understanding of appropriate actions and behaviors within the firm. However, the agreed-upon ways of operating are routinely violated and actors sometimes pursue paths of resistance. Far from static, small group cultures are constantly in flux.

Putting in the Hours to Compensate for Inefficiency

Given the constant fluctuations of small group cultural performances and its corresponding small group tenuousness, it is sometimes a wonder how small firm owners are able to accomplish the work necessary to maintain a business. As described in this dissertation, business leaders had difficulty convincing employees to complete work they believed was required to successfully accomplish firms' ostensive goals (e.g. Penelope was not always able to get her produce picked, sorted, and displayed how she wanted; Julian could not convince his siblings to help with administrative work; Jack was unable

get the factory floor employees to check the quality of their work and catch errors; and Alice was not able to find and retain reliable home health aides to both show up on time to clients' homes and comply with client care plans). Even though group cultures in each firm effectively generated order, performances of work tasks were highly inefficient. Despite such inefficiencies, firm leaders maintained thriving businesses. How was this possible?

One of the critical ways businesses were maintained and grew was by business owners working very long hours. I believe these hours were needed to compensate for the sometimes-problematic ways that small group cultures completed work. All firm owners in this study worked at least six days a week, ten to twelve hours per day.

Beyond these mentally and physically tiring hours, (and the strains such business commitments may put on family and friend relationships outside of work), I found some owners' dedication to work actively put their health at risk. A few months prior to beginning my data collection, Julian at Thorny Rose fell asleep driving and hit a telephone pole after staying up several days late at the shop preparing for Mother's Day. Because of a major back injury he incurred in the crash, his doctor informed him that he should stay off his feet for two weeks, refrain from lifting anything heavy for several months, and go to regular physical therapy for at least six months; otherwise, he may have permanent back pain. Julian came back to work after only three days of rest, and regularly missed his physical therapy appointments, instead, opting to work. He also regularly lifted heavy pails of flowers and funeral arrangements. As a result, he complained nearly daily about his back, and often had pain by the end of the workday.

At Rolling Hills, Penelope fell one evening when she was walking up a rain-soaked hill, and landed hard on her hand. A few days later when I saw her, she showed me her hand and wrist, which were noticeably swollen. She told me she could not move her wrist without pain. She had not visited a doctor and believed she just had a strain—so she wrapped up her hand and wrist with an elastic bandage. She said that “there’s too much going on now” to run to the doctor, but if it was still swollen in a few days, she’d “have it looked at.” She eventually went to the doctor and found out she fractured a small bone in her wrist and required a cast to heal.

Given the limited financial, human, and social capital of these small firms, extraordinary efforts of firm leaders may appear essential to create not just sustainable businesses, but growing enterprises. However, I would argue that these efforts by firm leaders were necessary because of their own managerial and leadership shortcomings and poor social skills, rooted in a failure to promote the development of group cultures that would encourage employees to be more efficient workers.

For example, at AeroGears, I suggest that factory floor employees could minimize mistakes, not through the implementation of more SOPs, but through a collaborative work culture that emphasizes accountability between factory workers. At Rolling Hills, Penelope could teach and encourage those volunteers willing to take on additional growth effort responsibilities, particularly in the prepared foods area, to see if they wanted this “extra learning opportunity” during non-farm work time. If Penelope could change her compulsion to keep the organic kitchen as “her kitchen,” she would not only increase the amount of assistance she would have in her efforts to grow, but perhaps also be able to retain the highest quality volunteers.

Advice to Small Businesses

Small business owners and managers need to see culture as a critical aspect of their organizations' success rather than an afterthought. Given the need for flexibility among staff to assume a variety of responsibilities, the routine but unpredictable crises that organizational actors must respond to, and the nature of small business growth strategies as taking opportunities as they present themselves, small businesses may not benefit from formal structures and processes. By focusing on organizational values, beliefs, and behaviors that support worker's sense of identity and the meanings they find to be important to accomplishing firm tasks, leaders may be able to more effectively delegate work as well as find that workers assume responsibilities on their own. In doing so, firm actors will not only feel a greater sense of accountability and pride in their organization, but leaders should feel less burdened by the work of operating a small business. Rather than putting their own health at risk, small business owners can spend their time on business development, providing additional opportunities for worker education, or finding more personal time for family and socializing.

A few ways in which small businesses can improve their attention to culture's significance in their organizations include:

Leadership

Owner-managers play an important role in leading and managing their organizations. Leaders' ability to inspire loyalty and align employees with organizations' values is critically important (Haugh and McKee 2004). Strong leadership does not mean that an organizational culture is developed at the top, pushed down to all group members,

forcing organizational actors to follow a particular ordering of group interactions.

However, in each of the firms researched in this study, small business leaders played a critically influential role in the generation of order. This was particularly true in routine crisis performances and routine growth performances.

Entrepreneurial leaders must do more than develop an organizational vision on the one hand, and pay the bills on the other. Leaders provide group members an understanding of the primary goal of the organization for which performances are structured around. Small business leaders that fail to take an active role in developing interpersonal relationships with their employees to create shared meanings, may lose the opportunity to develop their business in the direction that they would like. If leaders do not take a primary role in focusing their firm's culture and its routine performances, employees will generate their own cultural performances.

Effective leaders should have a high level of social skill in order to enact the appropriate strategies to drive employee actions. Empathy and social skill is something that can be learned and developed in practice. Thus, entrepreneurial business leaders and organizations that support new and growing ventures, must consider more than leadership vision, accounting skills, supply chain processes, and capital financing, and recognize the critical role a leader's social skills and relationships to his or her employees has in the generation of firm order.

Onboarding

Onboarding, or "organizational socialization" is the process of bringing in an outsider into an organization. Onboarding generally refers to the process of providing

new employees with both skills and techniques of the business, as well as some understanding of appropriate behaviors and norms that are needed to success in the organization (Bauer and Erdogan 2011). None of the businesses I worked at as part of this research had any formal or informal introduction to the firm. I never saw any subsequent employees who began working after I started collected field data to go through any sort of socialization to the organization beyond reading a page of “rules” that constituted a contract (i.e. Rolling Hills) or a 15-page manual that primarily discussing the history of the organization and what it means to have industry accreditation (i.e. AeroGears). I had to determine both the explicit and implicit rules of operating by asking question after question. I did not know whether it was appropriate to ask all the questions I did ask, but since I had the guise of researcher in addition to employee, I could cite my academic reasons for my direct inquiries when I received less than accepting looks.

Since small group cultures provide the values, beliefs, and meanings of appropriate action, it would seem that small firms would want to provide a new group member the chance to learn the performance rules. However, prior research, as well as the current study, shows that small businesses fail to onboard new employees. Through an increased understanding of the importance of culture in small businesses, small firm owners should consider taking time with new employees to integrate them into the organization. Rather than leaving new hires to discover the operational rules on their own, small firm owners must take responsibility to help socialize a new employee into the firm’s culture.

Channels of Communication

In order to improve organizational efficiency, I suggest that small group actors have voice in their firms. For those firm members who do not have high levels of social skills and may not be able to corral others to support their interests, firm leaders must help to create comfortable spaces for firm members to share their opinions about organizational practices, air grievances, and be supported. Group cohesiveness, even in tight-knit work communities is fragile. Small groups do not persist without ongoing relational work and cooperation. Without opportunities for communication with superiors to ensure that everyone is “on the same page,” in terms of sharing meanings and beliefs, actors may become alienated from the group, losing their sense of identity and meaning.

Open channels of communication seem particularly important during routine growth performances. Even though the specific times of growth are not necessarily planned in advance, a generalized decision to grow is something that is predetermined. Because growth performances seem to destabilize organization meanings, it is critical for firm members to have the space to develop new, shared understandings of the work they are seeking to accomplish during times of growth. Without such opportunities for discussion, collaborative work and joint decision-making, group cohesiveness may rupture.

Application to Larger Organizations

Work Teams

Although most corporations today recognize that culture is an important organizational factor needed for success, as I previously stated, most businesses perceive culture to be a stable organizing tool that can be implemented top down. Despite top level

leadership attempts to institute a particular culture, we know from classic sociological scholars that actors segment themselves as groups become large (e.g. Simmel 1902), and even when bureaucratic structures seek to organize actors, informal relations and interactions often take precedence in informing decision-making (e.g. Blau 1964). Large organizations seem to implicitly recognize these social phenomena. Thus, it is common for most large businesses to manage work responsibilities and short- and long-term goals through small groups, or work teams. A robust literature on team work in organizations, rooted in psychology and social psychology, aims to understand how individuals function as teams, and how teams can improve overall organizational efficiency. However, such studies are often lab-based, abstracting the team itself from any real-life context and influences of its larger organization.

An idioculture perspective on team work in organizations requires researchers to account for the interpersonal dynamics of those team members, as well as the multiple ways in which the organization itself plays a critical role in the way that actors develop shared values, beliefs and rules of operating. Research on teams should be conducted within larger organizations, and would benefit from an idioculture perspective.

Onboarding

New employee adjustment to an organization through an onboarding process has been shown to be important for employee outcomes, including satisfaction, commitment, and turnover (see Snell, 2006 for a review). Although many organizations develop onboarding processes that make take several days worth of introductions and reviewing of organizational protocols and regulations, few companies use this time to allow new

employees to meet with the teams of people they are likely to work with. Just as recommended for small firms, large organizations should create time and space for new employees to not only meet, but also spend time with team members (both senior and other new hires) to get to know one another. A review of formal information during onboarding does not adequately provide new employees an understanding of the shared values and beliefs of a team.

I would suggest that onboarding processes that give new hires the opportunity to build interpersonal relationships prior to specific work assignments and engagement with tasks, enables a smoother transition into the organization by giving that new hire the chance to establish a relational basis for working with their team. More research is needed to understand the effect of the development of interpersonal connections during onboarding on rates of absenteeism, retention, and individual and team-based outcomes. Based on the research in this dissertation, I would suggest that an onboarding process that incorporates opportunities for new employees to get to know new team members would provide both new hires and team members the chance, early on, to determine if a new employee is the right fit for the team. Moreover, if an individual seems to violate shared assumptions during non-work group interactions, team leaders can attempt to teach that individual the group's values. These times for interacting may help reduce the initial stresses of work as well as reduce opportunities for potential crises.

Workplace Identity

Managers and professionals closely identify with the companies for whom they work. Large organizations often seek to develop a top-down culture, codifying rules and

regulations of organizational values, beliefs, and behaviors in an effort to control culture and in turn, control employees (Kunda and Van Maanen 1999). As Kunda (1992) explores in his research on corporate culture in a major engineering corporation, organizational-level efforts to control behavior may have negative impacts on individuals. The impact of cultural regulations results in ritual performances including appropriate emotional displays that can influence employees' own sense of self and identity. Kunda found that many employees were capable of performing appropriate emotions publicly but also held contradictory views of the organization and their work that enabled them to distance themselves from domination by the cultural ideology of the organization. Such efforts require high levels of emotional labor. Researchers suggest that not all employees are capable of establishing boundaries between necessary emotional and behavioral displays without high levels of emotional labor that can cause employee burnout (Brotheridge and Grandey 2002).

A strategy of cultural coercion may provide the means for an organization's employees to have some latitude for self-selection (i.e. those who are not able to cut-it, wind up leaving) as well as providing a rationale to eliminate employees whom leaders believe are not a "good fit" for the company. However, through both voluntary and compulsory strategies of member exclusion, corporations may be losing employees that may have brought significance value, diverse opinions, skills, and creativity to the organization. Those employees who are able to "cut it" and have the wherewithal to manage competing identities, may grow resentful of the organization that requires so much of their emotional labor. Aside from feelings of resentment that may impact an employees' work ethic or decision to continue employment, an employee with high levels

of social skills and the capacity to select strategies to persuade other employees to develop coalitions against the established culture can also harm an organization's efforts towards accomplishing its goals.

Large corporations may benefit from including employees in any codification of culture into employee manuals that may be used for onboarding as well as for ongoing employee training. Businesses must also regularly revisit any decisions they have made about an organizational-wide culture to see if this culture is appropriate for ongoing changes in market conditions that may influence the organization and the way in which individuals should consider how they relate to one another. Finally, firm leaders must understand that teams within their organizations may develop their own cultural performances to successfully complete their organizational goals, and that these teams must have the freedom to develop those cultures as appropriate for identity construction and interpersonal relationships.

The Place for Formal Processes and Structures

Although this dissertation has focused on culture's role in generating order in small enterprising businesses in the absence of formal structures and processes, as entrepreneurial firms continue to grow, increasing the number of employees and complexity of activities, formal structures are required to order activities. Small groups of individuals interact constantly, develop relationships with high levels of affect, and generally come to know one another very well. But in large groups, relationships become more complex and fleeting, and participation within a group weakens. Formal ways of organizing are needed to help structure patterns of interactions among members of large

groups (Simmel 1902). Thus, as organizations become more complex and as segmentation between groups of actors threaten the totality of a group from accomplishing its ostensive goals, more structures and oversight is required to ensure organizational order.

The introduction of explicit, codified rules and processes is not inevitable. Some small business owners do not want to grow their firms. Entrepreneurs start firms for a variety of reasons, not solely for financial motivation (Storey 1994). Researchers find that many small businesses deliberately refrain from exploiting opportunities for expansion (Davidsson 1989; Storey 1994; Watson 1995). However, the businesses selected for study in this dissertation were required to be currently experiencing growth at the outset of data collection and its owners needed to explicitly intend to continue to grow their organizations. Moreover, those businesses I would label as entrepreneurial firms are interested in business growth.

The individual from my field sites that most ardently spoke about the need to define work responsibilities, institute regulated processes, and develop more formalized processes was Alex at AeroGears. He wanted to develop path-dependent processes not only to comply with aerospace part production protocols, but also to help AeroGears operate more efficiently (by reducing production errors and hopefully increasing profit). In addition to distinguishing people's roles and ensuring that managers do not overstep their scope of responsibility, Alex was also adamant about, "taking hands out of the process," by limiting the constant oversight and influence of Jack and Leo on factory processes, and instead creating Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to help regulate

the factory work. Alex repeatedly emphasized that, “[w]e need to rely on systems, not Jack’s head.”

Alex said that so much of the information in the way things operate at the factory “has not been institutionalized,” and that Tinsley said he was initially hired to transform tacit organizational information into explicit processes and data resources. In this way, work responsibilities can be spread out among multiple workers who can follow procedures and protocols to complete relevant tasks, as well as access information to make organizational decisions. Despite these ambitious aims, daily operations at AeroGears remained in Jack and Leo’s control. Efforts to move towards more rational, formal regulations and processes of operations were stymied. As a result, Alex would regularly comment that, “making suggestions around here is like stubbing your toe...It’s the AeroGears way!” Although I would argue that his frustrations are emblematic of most small firms.

Prior research suggests that informality in small firms is not simply an “inevitable product of entrepreneurialism and close interpersonal relations in the workplace” (Ram et al. 2001:859). Ram et al. (2001) propose that external influences, including the product market, labor force, existing modes of work, and technology all influence managerial choices in the extent of informality. The findings in this dissertation tend to support these assertions, but my conclusions move beyond some of the assumptions that underlie this rationale. As in the case of AeroGears, a variety of internal and external influences impact firm organizing. In addition, shared histories, common experiences, and ideas and philosophies brought into the organization by employees and managers influence the ways in which formal structures may become part of a growing firm.

Managers make choices to operate their organizations within the context of limited human, financial, and social resources, but organizing is not conducted unilaterally or constituted through a top-down processes as Ram et al.'s argument would suggest. If firms operated in this way, Alex should be able to institute the formal procedures he would like to see at AeroGears. However, he faces resistance by others in the organization that would prefer to retain power over processes instead of working on streamlining and rationalizing organizational structures that would perhaps enable firm growth. In order for researchers to better understand factors that come to influence entrepreneurial firms, we need to move past dichotomies often used to describe firm behavior and understand the dynamic factors that come to influence how order is generated in small enterprising firms.

Future Research

Future research should investigate the ways that growing organizations develop and implement formal processes and structures and the way small group cultures adjust, resist, incorporate and transform explicit procedures. Some research on family businesses has explored the concerns of “professionalizing” family firms (e.g. Fletcher 2002, Stewart and Hitt 2012), finding that there are a variety of ways firms come to incorporate formal modes of operation. However, prior research has not sought to investigate these concerns through a cultural perspective. New ideas, beliefs, and values will not doubt develop as a result of the incorporation of formalized processes—and the final way in which those processes are used in practice will likely differ (to some degree) from their initial intended use. Prior to actual implementation of any formal procedures and

standards of operating, entrepreneurial businesses must be in position to accommodate such change.

I found several significant reasons why the businesses researched in this dissertation could not currently implement formal structures. Given the current cultural conditions listed below, inefficiencies will continue to rule the way these firms operate:

1. Small business managers are knowledgeable about the types of procedures and protocols that would improve organizational efficiency, but they lack understanding of how to implement them.
2. Although managerial responsibilities in organizations are often explicitly known in small businesses, they are frequently violated—managers themselves often fail to fulfill their own roles or invade others' organizational roles. As a result of this inattention and interference, the few procedures and protocols in place are sometimes disregarded entirely or altered in particular situations. The result is confusion among both managers and employees about when organizational rules should be followed.
3. When consultants or new employees are brought into organizations with the goal of generating organizational change, managers fail to recognize the need to provide these organizational “changers” the proper authority to put new procedures into practice and to discipline those who violate new protocols.
4. Managers often lack recognition that their organizations are plagued with poor communication. When managers occasionally diagnose communication problems, efforts made to improve communication are typically symbolic rather than substantive. (E.g. Companies institute weekly managerial meetings with the stated goal of improving organizational communication, but the meetings merely review information managers are already abreast of and fail to create any new individual, division or organizational goals.)
5. Managers fail to create incentive or disciplinary structures. As a result, lackluster employee performance or minor employee infractions are met either with weak and ineffective punishment by managers, or stern paternalistic chastising. Both forms of discipline fail to translate into long-term corrective action.
6. Managers do not have routine employee evaluations, leaving employees questioning their place and opportunity for growth in the organization. In turn, employees often show little initiative to generate procedural improvements independently because of a lack of understanding how it may benefit them.

7. Long-term employees typically resist change and tend to reaffirm their power over their particular piece of the organization when confronted with change. Management ignores this resistance and battles of authority are left to employees.

8. New hires are left to informal and unregulated direction from other organizational employees. Rather than senior employees folding new hires into the organizational culture, senior employees sometimes create a division between themselves and recent hires in order to assert their authority and relevance to the organization in hopes of securing their employment.

9. Employee recruitment is unsystematic and potential employees are not sought out to fill particular organizational gaps. The employment process is similarly vague and disorganized—allowing some individuals who should be weeded out of the employment process to get hired and some individuals who should be incentivized to accept job offers to instead opt out of the process to pursue other jobs. The result is that many new employees fail to stay at the organizations long-term, leaving voluntarily or being let go.

The descriptions above provide some initial ideas about the complex story of the inability to implement formal processes, even if they may be needed. Together with effective although inefficient small group cultures, inefficiencies in organizations are resilient. However, this is where the next story begins. Future research should consider the conditions under which formal processes can be implemented in entrepreneurial businesses and how businesses (and small group cultures) change as a result of explicit structural changes to their operations to rationalize processes.

Concluding Remarks

The businesses explored in this study cover a diverse range of industries, sizes, ages, leadership styles, clients, and geographic settings. Nonetheless, this research is qualitative, involving a limited number of cases, covering a relatively short time frame.

The aim of this study was not to develop broadly generalizable findings. The goal was to generalize to the level of theory to explain the experiences of others in comparable

situations, rather than any statistical notion of representativeness. Towards this end, I believe that the contributions made in this study to conceptualize culture in small enterprising firms as comprised of three distinct performances, meets that goal. Furthermore, drawing attention to the cultural management of entrepreneurial ventures, and to firms that are not typically seen as exciting arenas of social activity, were important objectives in this research as well.

I hope that management researchers and practitioners more seriously consider the role of culture in small entrepreneurial firms. Management scholars would benefit from researching the way idiocultures provide the means by which order is generated in small ventures and the way work is accomplished without formalized roles, procedures, and structures. Moreover, organizational researchers must more critically examine the micro-level work of firm actors in order to understand the resilience of inefficient modes of operating. When firms seem to require rationalizing structures, researchers should consider how growing firms might struggle to understand how to incorporate new procedures and rules into their existing cultural orders. Furthermore, external pressures must be better understood in the way they influence decision-making of groups of actors, especially through a bottom-up process.

The account I provide of multiple performances of a firm's ostensive goals should provide sociologists and cultural scholars additional ways to conceptualize the dynamic way culture is used to provide shared meanings, identities, and beliefs of appropriate action among groups of actors. These changing cultural performances also highlight the inherent fragility of small groups, the violations of beliefs of appropriate actions, and resistance to change. The majority of American workers, and employees around the

world, spend most of their waking hours working in small businesses. To positively influence the lives of millions of workers, researchers must pursue opportunities to help improve organizational outcomes and employees' well-being through further research and application of how small businesses actually work.

Appendix

Characteristics of Field Sites

Figure 1: Number of Paid Employees (*full / part time*)

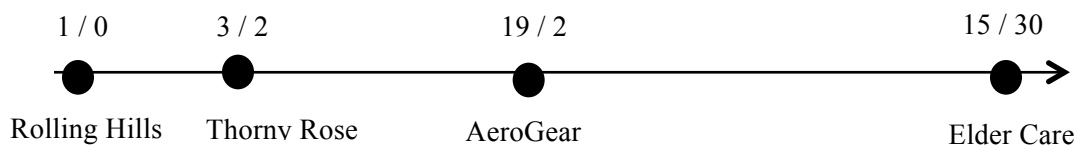


Figure 2: Type of Sales (*by proportion of total revenue*)

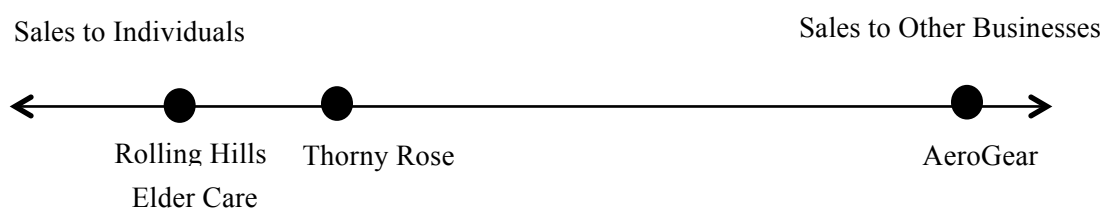


Figure 3: Family Involvement in the Business (*by quantity*)

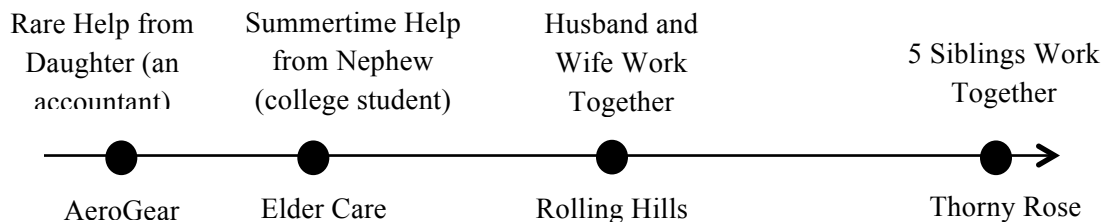


Figure 4: Highest Level of Education Achieved by Business Owners/Primary Manager

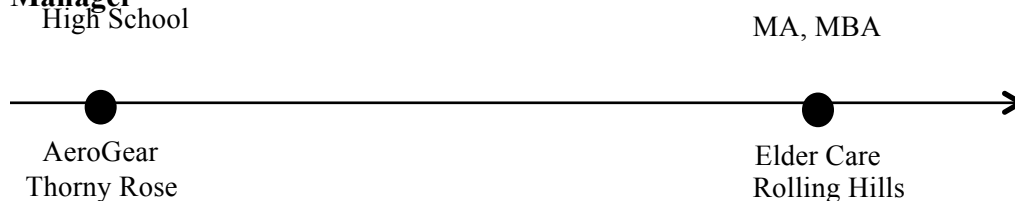


Figure 5: Age of Owners/Primary Managers

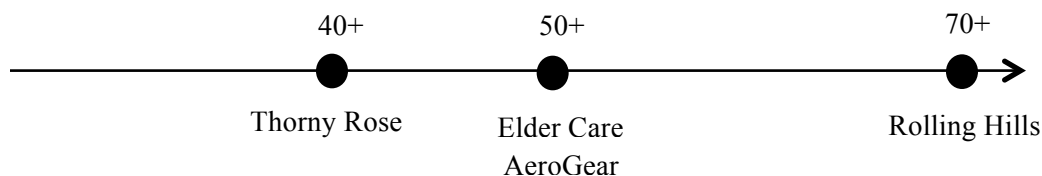


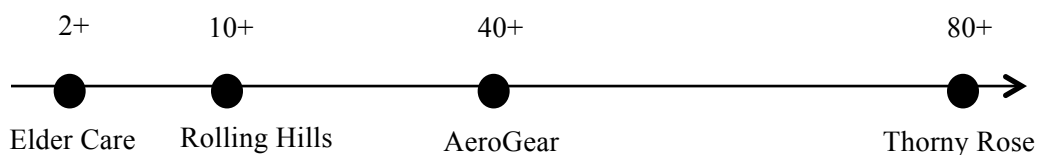
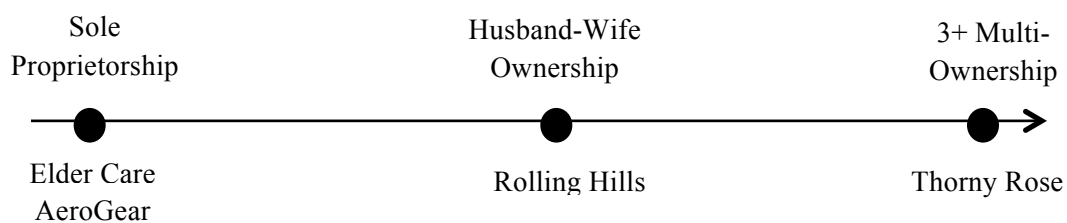
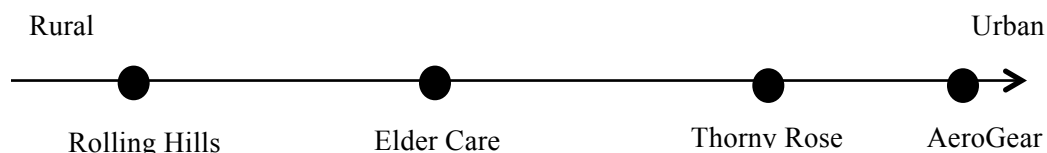
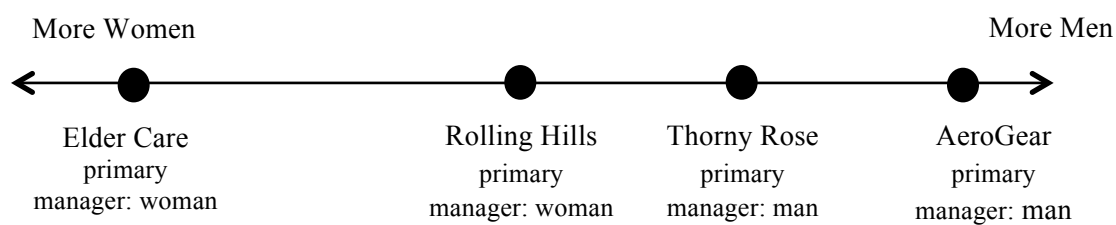
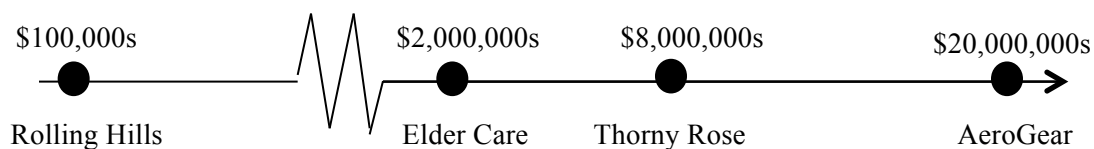
Figure 6: Length of Time in Business (*in years*)**Figure 7: Ownership****Figure 8: Environment (*population of city business is located*)****Figure 9: Gender Composition in Businesses****Figure 10: Revenue (*from all business ventures, approximate amounts, +/-10%*)**

Figure 11: Unpaid Workers (*by quantity of workers and time devoted*)

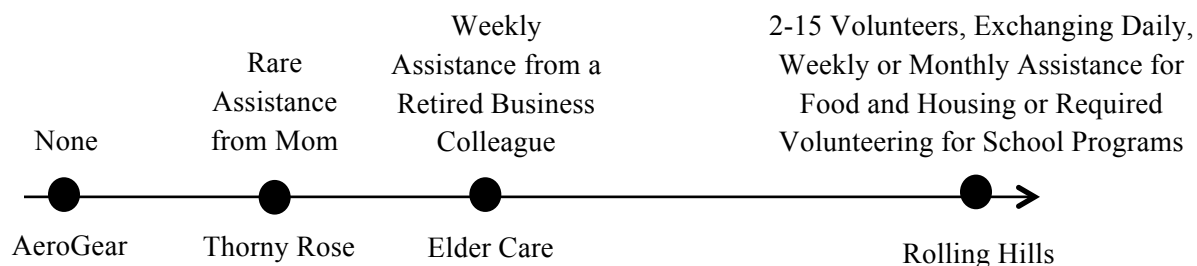
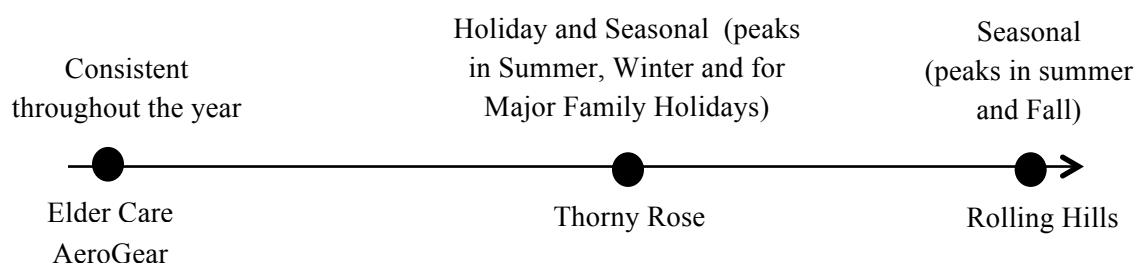


Figure 12: Annual Workflow (*level of intermittency*)



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