Green Employees: Organizational Identification in an Environmentally Friendly Company

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GREEN EMPLOYEES:
ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION IN AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY COMPANY

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GREEN EMPLOYEES:
ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION IN AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY COMPANY

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Environmental sustainability is an issue facing our global society and one that must be addressed through communication in order to encourage change amongst individuals. The current research focuses on the organization, in this instance a “Green” printing company, and its role in building identification amongst employees. This study focuses on environmental sustainable practices initiated or continued by employees through the use of a directed mission statement and organizational rhetoric. Utilizing individual interviews, the findings suggest that by building organizational identification, more environmentally-friendly practices amongst organizational members may be achieved.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In order to achieve environmental sustainability, the planet’s resources must only be consumed at a rate less than the rate with which they can replenish (Mraz, 2008). Nonrenewable resources, such as metals and plastics, must be recycled in order to reduce the amount of waste produced and to prevent the overfilling of landfills which consume a large part of the nonrenewable resource of land. The necessity of preserving our natural resources pervades our everyday communication habits. A primary example of this inundation is the spotlight the preservation of natural resources received in the public addresses of the 2008 presidential candidates. Even global leadership organizations, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, have noted the importance of the environment and the effect on safety questioning whether “our society has the capability and resilience to adjust to stress factors of an environmental nature” (Nukamp, 1999, p. 337). When discussing environmental sustainability, several issues are taken into consideration including the amount of natural resources available, past and present pollution levels, management of our environmental issues, as well as the effect on not only the United States, but also the global environment. Awareness is the first step towards environmental sustainability and that awareness can only be achieved through communication.

What then must be considered is how communication about the importance of environmental conservation can be achieved by relevant organizations. Environmental sustainability is not just a local issue, but one spanning borders with national and international consequences. Preserving the environment is a concern for not only the
individual, but also the global population. Many organizations have taken on the charge of becoming environmentally sustainable including the organization in the current case study.

One way in which organizations can influence employee behavior is through socialization to the organization’s norms. Socialization is often studied in organizational communication as the process in which newcomers adapt, reduce uncertainty, and learn the desired behaviors of the organizations to which they are a member (Allen, 2006). Within an organization, socialization is the process of organizing “the kinds of relationships and identities individuals establish” (Barge & Schlueter, 2004, p. 233). Often, the majority of an individual’s time is spent within organizations. Thus his/her fellow members have a major effect on an individual’s belief structures and values. Past research has primarily focused on the socialization of employees to internal organizational values such as working together as a team to produce higher returns for the organization. However few researchers have examined the role of organizations in socializing employees to outside cultural values, ones that benefit an entire society, in particular the idea of environmental sustainability. The current study serves as a step in filling this gap in the research.

Postmes et al. (2001) believe employees gain more identity salience when vertical communication occurs within the organization, noting “vertical communication strengthens the distinctiveness of the organization and helps to define what the organization stands for in the eyes of its employees” (p. 240). Scott (2007) noted when an organization specifically targets a goal such as environmental sustainability and communicates that goal to its workers through use of a mission statement, with language
targeted at goal, or with logos representative of the organization’s mission, employees are more likely to identify with the organization and behave in ways that match the organization’s mission. These strategies appeal to the employees’ needs to belong to a group (Scott, 2007). Scott (2007) concluded “integration of Social Identification Theory and communication in identification scholarship promises a better understanding of vital issues related to identification and organization” (p134).

While social identification theory has been extensively studied in the psychology field and organizational identification studies are abundant, the two areas rarely have been integrated. Hogg and Terry (2000) noted “the challenge for the future is to integrate new social identity mechanisms centrally into theories of organizational behavior” (p. 135). Hogg and Terry’s (2000) study explored how communication about a company’s value structures translates into employee identification.

In addition to adding to organizational communication literature, the current study explored identification from a qualitative perspective. Currently, there are few studies which explore organizational identification from a qualitative perspective and none which study identification within environmentally-friendly organizations, in particular the mission statement of the organization. Ashforth and Mael (1989) suggested a need for further studies on the consequences of social identification. The authors suggested studying the role of organizational socialization through interplay among symbolic interactions and management as well as the emergence of social identities. Building on research conducted about the effect of organizational mission statements, the current study sought emergence of a social identity through the study of organizational rhetoric and its role in employee identification. Specifically, this study explored the effect
organizations can have on employees in strengthening social values concerning environmental sustainability.

Individuals have a plethora of options for group memberships, often being members of a vast number of groups simultaneously. They may exhibit differing levels of commitment to a group based on the alignment and similarity between various belief structures. Individuals “draw on accessible categories and investigate how well they fit in the social field” (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 125). By focusing this research on how individuals identify with values of a working organization, a new understanding of the effect organizational communication can have on employees is achieved. Work organizations differ from social organizations in that the hierarchy of leadership has a different effect on group membership as bosses hire and fire employees. Also, work memberships result in payment and thus may affect the level of identification an individual experiences. The differences between organizational membership and work group have been thoroughly researched and will thus not be the topic of the current study. However, it is important to note these differences can influence group membership. It is also important to note that behaviors at work can be forced by the organizational leadership.

The current research sought to discover if/how one organization created identification amongst its employees in the process of aligning with the changing social values of today’s global culture. As a catalyst to the current study, the researcher purposively sought out an organization which had a mission of environmental sustainability. As Fairhurst et al. (1997) noted identification with an organization taps into one’s attitude “toward their organization leading them to exert great effort, perform
well, and hold the organization’s goals and values in positive regard” (p. 247).

Environmental sustainability is currently at the forefront of national and international importance. This research explored the possibility of organizational identification with an organizational rhetoric in adapting an employee’s attitudes and behaviors towards environmental sustainability.

The current research sought to illuminate how one organization is choosing to handle environmental preservation and how it communicates with its employees about the importance of environmental sustainability. This research specifically targeted the use of one company’s mission statement and accompanying rhetoric in providing employees with a primary example, or prototype, of environmental sustainability with which they may mold their own behaviors. Specifically, the current case study sought to discover how Liberty Group Printing creates employee identification between its employees and a slogan/mission of “Live Green, Print Green.” According to the Vice-President of the organization, Liberty does not have a formal/written mission statement. Although “Live Green, Print Green” is less formal than a written mission statement, throughout the course of employee interviews it is evident that the statement functions as an enacted mission for the organization. Therefore the literature regarding mission statements is more relevant to the current study.

Through a review of the organizational rhetoric of Liberty Group Printing including the organizational mission statement of “Live Green, Print Green,” and employee interviews, the current research sought to discover if and how organizational communication can affect the belief structures of employees concerning environmental sustainability. Liberty’s organizational rhetoric places the necessity of environmental
sustainability at not only the forefront of the company’s primary function of producing print communication, but also at the forefront of employee communication and thus value structures. This focus is evident by the well-crafted and enacted mission statement. The current study questions if the emphasis placed on environmental sustainability is translating into changed behavior on the part of the employees.

Before proceeding, a review of the predominant organizational rhetoric is necessary. Liberty has placed a great emphasis on its commitment to sustainability, not only switching its paper sources to recycled products, but also placing focus on using recyclable soy inks. This change has been noted in Liberty’s mission of “Live Green, Print Green” which is displayed in the company’s logo below:

![Liberty Logo](image)

The company has taken great strides to inform its employees and customers of the importance of recycling; including the effect recycling can have on the environment in every sales pitch making each one an educational session. Liberty delivers the organization’s product in a green vehicle that also features the logo of the company. Posters, on the next page, are hung in the customer entrance and in the employee boardroom in order to not only remind customers but also the employees as well of the organization’s mission.
Not only is the intent of environmental sustainability prominent in the nonverbal communication of the company, the company also places emphasis on the environment in its employee handbook, through the communication used to socialize new employees, and in the sales pitches to potential customers.

In order to align the current case study with previous research, review of the organizational situation in alignment with organizational identification principles is necessary. According to Abrams and Hogg (1990), when individuals identify with a group, in-groups and out-groups form based on the characteristics of that group. In-groups exhibit characteristics aligning with the cultural norms, whereas out-groups defy the cultural norms. For instance, within an organization focusing on environmental sustainability, an in-group which favors environmentally sustainable options over less eco-friendly options will be present. In-group members would exhibit characteristics such as devoting time and energy to recycling, choosing materials that are products of
recycling, and committing to leaving the smallest footprint on the environment possible. Members of this in-group would associate with other individuals who have similar beliefs about the preservation of the global environment. According to Abrams and Hogg (1990), identification leads to members communicating with outsiders, seeking to make them part of the in-group. This communication may occur with families or in other group settings with which the employee is a member.

In the case of the “going green” movement, individuals who do not exhibit a conscious effort to be more environmentally sustainable would be classified as the out-group by those who focus on environmental sustainability. Members of the in-group view their efforts as more beneficial to our society as they are trying to conserve resources for future generations. Individuals who are members of the in-group feel superior to those who are less environmentally friendly. Ashforth and Mael (1989) noted classifications are only relevant when there is another classification with which to compare, for instance “the category of young is meaningful only in relation to the category of old” (p. 21). An environmentally friendly individual is only so because there are some individuals who are not as conscious as others when considering environmental sustainability. An individual who is highly committed to an environmental stance of sustainability would unlikely be a member of a group who supported off shore drilling or a group who advocated for the destruction of rainforest to produce the world’s paper supply.

When a group chooses to support a cause, the group members feel a heightened commitment to that cause (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In this case study, the organization has made a stance on environmental sustainability, choosing to make both internal and
external publics aware of its commitment to recycling through organizational rhetoric. This commitment is evident by the images gracing the walls of the organization, the mission statement which is printed on the organizational material, and the products they use. Being a group member in this organization paves the way for a member to identify on the intermediate level, as discussed in the review of literature, with the organization.

This research provides an excellent example of a question facing current studies: whether individuals choose to classify themselves into groups based on that group’s values or whether adaptation to the group’s prototype occurs once membership is achieved. As some employees of the organization have been members for as long as twenty years, they have experienced many changes within the structure of the organization. A movement of environmental sustainability within the printing organization was implemented less than a year ago. While the members of the organization have shown obvious organizational commitment with the tenure on the job, the current study argues organizational members adapted to the new vision and changed their attitudes and behaviors in alignment with organizational goals instead of simply meeting the demands of the organization without identifying with its mission outside of the organization.

By focusing on an organization that has recently had a change in mission, the current study provided a new lens on employee identification, one in which the employee’s actions have had to adapt to changing work values. This study focused on an organization’s decision to change its identity, which was a decision initially made and driven by the leadership of the organization and relayed to employees through organizational rhetoric and the creation of a prototype.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Individuals take cues to form their identities from group memberships which, in turn, can influence their decision making processes, interpretations of the world around them, characteristics of themselves which they choose to exhibit to others, and also which groups they become members of in the future. The theory of Social Identification is based on this concept and emerged from a social psychological perspective that has since been explored from an organizational perspective. Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) noted identification is the communicative construction of identity as individuals interact with one another. This literature review focuses on the foundations of organizational identification, the implication of in-group membership and the formation of prototypes, in particular the use of organizational rhetoric in establishing prototypical mission statements. Several studies in organizational identification are reviewed and critiqued from the researcher’s perspective. Finally, based upon extant literature, a research question is posed.

Foundation of Organizational Identification

The American worker spends forty hours and upwards a week within a work group (www.dol.gov). When describing oneself, an individual often refers to him/herself as an employee of a particular organization, closely tying his/her belief structures to that of an organization (Voss, Cable, & Voss, 2006). Studying organizational identification as a subset of social identification and self-categorization is beneficial because it ties the employees’ characteristics with “the set of beliefs about what is most core, enduring and distinctive about the organization” (Voss, Cable, & Voss, 2006, p. 741).
Organizational Identification Theory is rooted in the social psychological theory of social identification which has been utilized to further develop the field of organizational communication. Tajfel and Turner (1972), the original authors of Social Identification Theory (SIT), described social identity as “the individual’s knowledge that he/she belongs to certain groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership” (p. 31). By categorizing themselves into groups, individuals recognize characteristics within themselves based on similarities with others in the group. Abrams and Hogg (1990) noted “social identity theory assigns a central role to the process of categorization which partitions the world into comprehensible units” (p. 2). These categories are often compartmentalized based on demographics such as age, gender, or socioeconomic status. One’s culture, religious background, or places of residence are just a few more examples of how individuals categorize their group memberships.

SIT explores the phenomenon of group memberships and how individuals utilize groups in order to define personal characteristics. The theory of self-categorization describes the processes individuals participate in so they may classify themselves as group members. Hogg and McGarty (1990) noted self-categorization theory “differentiates between intergroup and interpersonal relations” (p. 10). This theory provides a more integrated lens into individuals cognitive processes not only from their sole viewpoint, but also from a lens they gain through group membership. From a review of previous literature, Hogg and Terry (2000) further explain self-categorization as “the relationship between self-concept and group behavior that details the social cognitive processes that generate social identity effects” (p. 123). As a member of a group,
individuals will act in accordance with the group’s norms and rules. The authors assert self-categorization is the cognitive basis of group behavior. Individuals classify themselves into categories on three levels: the superordinate level of humanity, the intermediate level of in-group/out-group, and the subordinate level of self as unique from other in-group members (Hogg & McGarty, 1990). The first level of identification is concerned with what it means to be human while the third level is defining one’s personal identity. Of particular interest to the current study is the intermediate level. Group dynamics are highlighted at the intermediate level which “accentuates the group prototypicality, stereotypicality, or the normativeness of people” (Hogg & McGarty, 1990, p. 13). This level of identification leads to group cohesion and loyalty to the group’s goals. Decision making within a group is often “more extreme than the average initial position of the group members in the direction of the initially favoured group mean” (Hogg & McGarty, 1990, p. 15). While members of a group may hold similar opinions, their opinions are strengthened when they can identify with other group members’ opinions.

One motivation behind self identification with an organization is to build the self-esteem of the individual (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). By categorizing oneself in the larger organizational context, members can experience the joys and successes of the organization as a whole. An individual takes on the status of the group by simply aligning themselves with the group’s membership. In this case, the employee gains self-esteem based on the numerous recognitions by environmental groups highlighting the prestige of the organization in leading the industry through environmental initiatives.
A related concept to organizational membership based on building self-esteem is that individuals increasingly identify themselves with groups which exhibit higher levels of prestige (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Individuals want to be a part of organizations that are viewed as winners. This is true of organizations from sports teams to organizations such as in the current study which have been recognized as champions for innovation within their own industry. By being a member of a prestigious organization, the individual gains higher self-esteem through the credit given to the organization. This is the second way in which self-categorization is aligned with social identification.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) noted “it is tacitly understood by managers that a positive and distinctive organizational identity attracts the recognition, support, and loyalty of not only organizational members but other key constituents” (p. 28). By highlighting the accomplishments of an organization, leaders are able to build greater amounts of loyalty from not only employees, but also shareholders, customers, and job seekers.

Members of a particular organization may be more aligned in their characteristics with the group, such as employees of the health care industry may all have a desire to keep their patients healthy. These individuals seem to form stronger in-group membership than individuals who simply find themselves in the same group, such as being fans of a particular sports team. According to Ashforth & Mael (1989) “individuals tend to choose activities congruent with salient aspects of their identities, and they support the institutions embodying those identities” (p. 25).

Ashforth and Mael (1989) warned against the potential to confuse organizational identification with organizational commitment. The authors distinguished the two by highlighting the distinction between a member sharing similar goals and thus joining an
organization, compared to the individuals becoming a member and then demonstrating in-group favoritism (p. 24). This distinction favoring the in-group which share similar values and belief structures is organizational identification. This area is one which must be considered in future research, whether individuals choose to classify themselves or whether they take on differing characteristics based on the group’s ever changing prototype. Employees who identify with organizational goals consider the results of their actions in regards to organizational consequences. One may choose to stay committed to an organization simply because it is the best option for employment he/she has, but one who is identified with an organization continues with that organization because he/she feel as though he/she is serving not only the organization’s mission, but his/her own mission as well.

Individuals build social identification with an organization in three ways: through organizational socialization, role conflict and intergroup relations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Socialization is the process of an individual becoming acquainted with a new organization. According to Barge and Schlueter (2004), this process occurs during the encounter stage which is a “key moment for people as they construct their relationship with an organization” (p. 233). Through organizational socialization, individuals are able to discover the belief structures and characteristics of the organization. Before becoming a member of the organization, the employee may have had some similar beliefs as they sought out employment with the company, however the vision they had of the organization may be very different from the reality. The process of socialization helps align the images the employee may have had with the reality. Barge and Schlueter (2004) take on a managerial perspective when describing organizational socialization
noting socialization is “molding the new recruit into an ideal employee” (p. 252). In the case of the current study, the organization may seek out employees who favor environmental sustainability and shape them into employees who demand eco-friendly solutions in everyday work life or use rhetoric to mold the employees’ belief structures and habits.

Employees build social identification with an organization through role conflicts. Often members of an organization have many different identities which they must manage. These identities may include a family identity in which they must encompass the values of a father or a mother, a religious identity in which they must conform to the beliefs of a particular group, and a work identity where their values must be shared with their work group, some of which may be conflicting with the other roles. Ashforth and Mael (1989) noted “it is not the identities per se that conflict, but the values beliefs, norms and demands inherent in the identities” (p. 29). An individual negotiates the roles they play based on the settings in which they find themselves. Ashforth and Mael (1989) contended “conflict between identities tends to be cognitively resolved by ordering, separating, or buffering the identities” (p. 30). An individual may have a belief structure for an organizational setting and another for home life. However, when an employee reaches identification with organizational rhetoric, his/her values and belief structures change and the employee will carry these beliefs over into his/her other roles. This concept has implications for the current study in that organizational rhetoric which encourages environmental sustainability may change the behaviors of the employee in his/her family life.
In-group/Out-group

Hogg and Terry (2001) identified two sociocognitive processes individuals experience while establishing group membership. The first process is *categorization* which helps distinguish group boundaries and memberships. This process involves outlining the characteristics an individual possesses in order to be a member of the in-group. The second step occurs when a member considers self-enhancement as a perk to group membership. Self enhancement occurs when “comparisons between salient groups serve to enhance the self by favoring one’s own ingroup” (Scott, 2007, p. 124). Social classification serves both the function of segmenting and ordering the social environment as well as providing an individual with the means to systematically defining others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). By segmenting one’s characteristics from those characteristics of out-group members, salience of the individual’s characteristics can be achieved. One believes themselves to be superior to the out-group based on these differences.

Through this concept of ordering, individuals define themselves by comparison with both members of the same group and individuals outside of the group. This postulate of social identification theory draws on Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory, which noted individuals have an upward directional drive. In order to achieve upward mobility in self identification, individuals compare themselves to others who possess similar characteristics or who are slightly better in certain aspects of their character. By comparing oneself to others, an “individuals’ desire for positive self-evaluation provides a motivational basis for differentiation between social groups” (Abrams & Hogg, 1990, p. 3). Turner (1999) noted an individual’s self concept is created by that “person’s self-concept based on their group memberships with associated
value connotations and emotional significance” (p.8). Characteristically similar individuals become members of the in-group and those who have different characteristics become members of the out-group. An individual’s in-group is perceived as both different and better than the out-group (Abrams & Hogg, 1990, p. 3). Social identity “produces in-group superiority as a consequence of social categorization” (Turner, 1999, p. 10). Individuals who wanted to feel superior in issues of environmental sustainability may purposively seek employment with the current organization or may continue employment because of their self-concept.

According to Abram and Hogg (1990), when social identity is more salient than personal identity, individuals are more likely to act as group members, showing discrimination between those who are members of the same group and those who are not. Ellemers et al. (1999) noted the “nature of the salient intergroup comparison influences how people perceive themselves in relation to others” (p. 1). In the current study, members who identify with the organization may view themselves as better than employees both within the organization and outsiders that do not focus on environmental sustainability.

Tajfel and Turner’s theory of Social Identification concluded a structure exists amongst groups. Some groups have more control over an individual’s identity than do others. For instance, members in a tight knit social fraternity may characterize themselves more similarly than do members of the same political party. Abrams and Hogg (1990) noted social groups are often in competition with one another over resources, rights, and power. Those groups with more power seek to keep the status quo, pressing upon their members the group’s characteristics and ideology. They seek
stronger identification amongst group members in order to maintain power. Membership in one group may prohibit membership in another. This is not to say that an individual may not choose group membership. Individuals can choose group membership as “boundaries between groups are permeable and individuals can pass from one group to another by virtue of choice” (Abrams & Hogg, 1990, p. 5). This transition involves challenging the status quo or redefining the characteristics which have made an individual a part of a subordinate group.

Turner (1999) contradicted Abrams and Hogg (1990) by noting “people cannot resolve their identity problems through individual action and mobility, but can only change their social situation by acting collectively in terms of their shared group membership” (p. 10). Instead of switching from group to group, Turner noted individuals resolve characteristic discrepancies within groups by adapting to the group dynamics or by communicating with other members in order to change the overall characteristics of the group. In this manner, either the individual adapts or the group does. If this adaptation cannot be achieved, an individual may find themselves no longer a group member. While Abrams and Hogg preceded Turner, current research seems to lend itself to the idea noted by the previous authors that individuals have a choice when becoming members of groups. Newcomers to the organization may note the reason they joined the company was because of the organization’s values.

The theory of social identification has sparked a great deal of research on the topic. Researchers from varied disciplines have applied the theory of in-groups and out-groups to many different situations. One extension of the social identity theory involves the processes an individual completes in order to categorize themselves.
Within an organization, there are often intergroup relations. Not only can an organization compare itself to other organizations by defining the boundaries so as they are out-groups, but subunits within the organization can also create in-groups and out-groups. Often within an organization, subgroups are created by status such as a group of employees versus a group comprised of management. While both groups share similarities, (they are both groups within the larger organization) often each group tries to distinguish itself from the other by highlighting the differences among group. Group boundaries are established (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). While the idea of intergroup relations has been established as a way in which individuals build social identity, there is still much work that needs to be completed on the effect of intergroup relations on organizational identification. Not known, for example, is the effect of the level of commitment to the organizational identity and subgroup identification. Does the employee act in such a way because they are forced or does he/she identify with the mission and act in such a way because it is ingrained in the employee’s value structure?

The current case study explored the building of the employee belief structure. In particular, the employee behavior and attitudes toward recycling and his/her adaptation based upon the organization’s change in mission. This can be gauged by the amount of communication outside of the organization that employee’s participate in and how, if at all, do the employee’s seek others to join the in-group.

Prototypes

Social-categorization theory further expands on Tajfel and Turner’s social identity theory by introducing the idea of a prototype in which group members gauge their identity. A prototype evokes the fundamental belief structures of the group’s goals. Self-
categorization, then, is a transformation which aligns one’s self-perception and behavior with the relevant in-groups prototype through depersonalization (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Depersonalization involves the transformation from one of individual identity to one focused on the group identity. While an individual may consider him/herself a social activist, when he/she becomes part of an environmental group his/her identity transforms from a singular effort to a group movement. Ashforth and Mael (1989) noted “identification may engender internalization of, and adherence to, group values and norms and homogeneity in attitudes and behavior” (p. 26). While a great deal is known about the formation of prototypes through self-categorization, few theorist examine the issue in relation to organizational prototypes, in particular the use of organizational rhetoric such as the mission statement in establishing the example.

Prototypes are often in the form of exemplary members who embody all the “attributes which characterize groups and distinguish them from other groups, including beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors” (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 123). Prototypes emerge according to the salient characteristics of the group. These prototypes maximize similarities with the in-group and highlight differences from the out-groups. According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), “a person is assigned the prototypical characteristics of the category to which he/she is classified” (p. 21). Prototypes often take the form of a charismatic leader of the organization, such as in work groups. This idea of prototypical leadership is of importance because much of our daily lives are affected by our work environment.

Prototypical leaders with an organization often lead the in-group within the organization (Lee, 2001). In his discussion of leader-member exchange and perceived
organizational justice, Lee (2001) noted the amount of communication between a supervisor and a subordinate can lead to the establishment of in-groups and out-groups. Leader-member exchange theory is based on the idea that leaders have limited amounts of personal and organizational resources (including resources such as time, energy, proximity to employees which can effect communication) which they must distribute amongst organizational members. Lee (2001) concluded those members who received greater amounts of leader-member exchanges will be viewed as part of the in-group while those with less leader-member exchanges will be viewed as part of the out-group. This study has implications for organizational identification in that the leader of an organization has a great effect on which members will be perceived as the in-group and if any organizational members will be perceived as part of the out-group. Fairhurst et al. (1997) noted the task of making a mission statement personally meaningful to organizational members is the leader “who facilitates individuals’ sense-making while making linkages to organizational goal achievement” (p. 246). Lee (2001) also concluded a greater amount of perceived organizational justice can lead to a greater commitment amongst members and as previously discussed could lead to greater organizational identification.

Missions as Prototypes

A way in which the organization can communicate its goals and directives is through the use of a mission statement, which can become the prototype for the organization. Duly noted is the ongoing debate of whether the mission statement truly persuades the employee towards the organizational goals or whether the statement is simply a compilation of words which are crafted and then ignored. Fairhurst, Jordan, and
Neuwirth (1997) questioned the effect of the organizational mission statement on employees. According to the authors, the corporate mission statement is “a standard by which the corporation is supposed to measure itself and emulate, and whose demand for perfection it should strive to fulfill” (Fairhurst et al., 1997, p. 243). As evident by the vast majority of organizations failing to live up to their mission statements to both inside and outside constituents, Fairhurst et al (1997) noted the lack of communication between those pushing the organizational mission and the membership to fault. Leuthesser and Kohli (1997) found only 16 percent of the company’s they studied included their mission statement in corporate annual reports.

In order for an individual to identity with an organization’s mission, a flow of communication from the prototypes of the organization to its members must occur. Communication between an organizational leader and its members about the organizational mission statement can lead to increased employee commitment, expand the member’s informational environment, and define an organizational role (Fairhurst, et al, 1997) which leads to an increased likelihood that a member will classify themselves within the organizational structure. This study highlights the importance of communication and serves as a foundation for questions in the current study which seek out the communication habits of the current organization with its employees.

Cheney and Christensen (2001) noted the need for the internal members of an organization to identify with the mission of an organization in order for external audiences to be convinced of that mission. In order to form an organizational identity, each member of an organization must act in accordance with the company’s characteristics, presenting a unified organizational identity (Cheney & Christensen,
2001). As both individuals and organizations find it increasingly more difficult to stand out in a crowd, “entities are in hot pursuit of solid, favorable identities even as such identities become harder to capture and sustain” (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 241). By developing an organizational mission statement which separates an organization from competitors, the organization is able to create a niche within its own industry. However, even the greatest worded mission statements will do little to inspire faith in the organization if the employees of the organization do not believe in its power.

Mission statements have primarily been researched in the past from a management perspective. Less focus has been given to the process of implementing mission statements from a communicative perspective. According to Perkins (2008), effective mission statements “help define an organization’s direction and inspire employee’s to achieve corporate goals” (p. 35). Leuthesser and Kohli (1997) found mission statements “are widely seen as necessary in helping a company form its identity, purpose and direction” (p. 59). In essence, the mission statement is an overarching communication strategy to convey an organizations purpose in a concise and often artistic expression to both outside constituents and inside stakeholders. The statement is often the starting point for creating a corporate identity (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997).

Perkins (2008) noted several key inputs to creating an effective mission including input from a wide array of corporate interest groups including employees and management, a well crafted team of “wordsmiths” who realize the effect the mission statement will have on stakeholders, and a message which is grounded in reality while still providing a driving force for the organization. According to Leuthesser and Kohli (1997) a mission statement has four primary targets: customers, stakeholders, employees,
and suppliers. For the purpose of the current study, the implication for employee communication is considered. The researcher further classified the messages into subcategories which each have a direct purpose: benefits, values, self-image and focus. Benefit statements reassure the employee of their safety, security and friendly working environment. Employee centered value statements refer to members of the organization as “family and emphasize the company’s commitment to provide professional and personal growth” (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997). Self-image and focus messages note the present location of an organization and its desired future. In the current study, the organization is seeking ways to be environmentally sustainable. The mission statement must be communicated to its employees in a way that highlights this desire while still providing benefits for the employee and aligning with personal value structures.

Leuthesser and Kohli (1997) argued a mission statement can only be effective if it is “capable of being challenged” (p. 59). The mission statement must “contain measurable goals, differentiate the firm from others, identify the firm’s aspirations rather than its present business, be relevant to all stakeholders, and be inspirational” (Luehtesser & Kohli, 1997). The current study reviews a mission statement which exemplifies the idea of setting a goal of environmental sustainability and the steps outlined by company policies which are necessary to achieve their goals through the mission of “Live Green, Print Green,” and accompanying rhetoric. Liberty’s mission differentiates this organization from others in the industry by focusing on a value uncommon in the printing world. Bart (1998) would classify this mission as a statement of vision—“a big, bold audacious, compelling, overarching, long-term goal” (p. 57). Bart, in his multiple studies
of organizational mission statements, focused primarily on firm performance in measuring mission statement success.

The success of a mission statement is not achieved through merely creating an inspiring motto for which employees should strive to achieve, but also by creating clear communication targets with which the mission statement should relate (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997). Perkins (2008) highlighted the importance of following a process in implementing a mission statement. He suggested gaining insight and feedback from a draft of a new mission statement before reaching a final statement of purpose.

Exposure, according to Perkins (2008), is the most important step in the communication of a new mission statement. Employees need to “hear a message multiple times to understand its ramifications” (p. 35). As Leuthesser and Kohli (1997) noted, a mission statement needs to be one idea with many implementations. Bart (1998) echoed this sentiment, noting “missions that live and have meaning within organizations must be simple enough to remember” (p. 57) and easily repeated. Like Perkins, Bart (1998) agreed mission statements can be revised and strengthened after years of experience.

Leuthesser and Kohli (1997) concluded mission statements are underutilized. Since most mission statements are used solely as an internal tool and not communicated effectively to all of the organizations constituents, they have little effect. Mission statements often lack specific goals and do not provide direction for a company’s efforts. While these conclusions seem to cast a shadow on the current research, Liberty has taken great measures to communicate its mission statement to outside constituents through the company’s advertising, branding, and rhetorical messages. The question then arises about how well the mission is communicated to its employees and whether the employees
identify with environmental sustainability. The current study examined the process of communicating and implementing a new mission statement which is a result of the company’s new value system, as well as its effect on employees.

In the organization, language is used to socialize the employee to the organization. Through memorable messages as outlined by Barge and Schlueter (2004) to employee orientation sessions, the communication that is passed from the organizational members to new group members helps establish the social identity of the newcomer. Through verbal and nonverbal interactions, a member “begins to resolve ambiguity and to impose an informational framework or schema on organizational experience” (Asforth & Mael, 1989, p. 27). As previously discussed, the organization’s mission statement is often a source of organizational characteristics that are passed on to its employees in a concise and easily memorized message. Bart (1998) believes mission statements are one of the least-used communication tools in gaining advantage over the competition. Bart (1998) concluded wise companies “understand that great missions ultimately hold the key to getting people to work together” (p. 58).

Case Studies

Organizational identification has been studied primarily through questionnaires of group members. Cheney’s (1983) work was a field study of organizational identification in a large corporate setting focusing on an individual’s identification with an employing organization and how he/she makes on-the-job decisions. Tackling a previously mentioned phenomenon of de-individualization, Cheney posed the ethical question of whether participation in modern organizations is destructive of “individuality” and personal values and strivings. Prior studies, Cheney claimed, had focused solely on the
outcome of organizational identification instead of the processes of an individual in identifying with that organization. The study focused on the ways in which an individual identified with organizational values in the decision making process. Cheney utilized the Organizational Identification Questionnaire, which has been frequently used in studies relating to organizational identification, and is used to identify three components of organizational identification: membership, loyalty and similarity (Cheney, 1983).

Cheney’s findings supported several of the major premises of organizational identification. Of the participants in the survey, one-third felt they contributed to the company’s success and pursuit of its goals. This finding not only aligns the purpose of the individual to that of the organization, but also notes an employee takes pride in the overall successes of the organization. Cheney concluded “a person identifies with a unit (organization) when, in making a decision, the person in one or more of his/her organizational roles perceives the unit’s interests” (p. 353). This study also noted changes in identification and decision making over time. As the company’s vision adapted so too does the goals of the organizational members adapt to the changes. Cheney noted employees consider “length of employment as one indicator of identification” (p. 355). Finally, Cheney concluded the actions of the organization have a great effect on employee identification. The participants in the study noted specifically fringe benefits and (open) communication as the greatest indicators of identification. One participant in the study noted “through an emphasis on communication, the company tries to make you feel how you are a part of things and not just in your own little corner” (Cheney, 1983, p. 356).
Cheney (1983) noted several limitations to his study. First, the author noted job search activities relate to the strength of identification. This study also represents a “snapshot” of the larger process of organizational identification (Cheney, 1983, p. 361). By conducting more case studies on the theory of organizational identification, a stronger basis for the theory can be established. The current case study provides a richer description of the process of identification as employees discuss implications of the change of the mission statement in the working environment as well as the effect on their other roles.

Another case study conducted by Larson and Pepper (2003) specifically looked at employees of a high-tech company and management of identification during a time of organizational change. The authors noted two important points in their research: 1.) Organization(al) members have multiple identity options from which to choose and 2.) Identification is the process of negotiating among the compatibilities and incompatibilities of identity targets/sources offered by the organization (Larson & Pepper, 2003). The study focused on the strategies (long-term discourse) and the tactics (short-term communication devices) to explore how organizational members negotiate their identity options. According to Larson and Pepper (2003), “these strategies reveal the negotiation of meaning through communication” (p. 533).

The study by Larson and Pepper resulted in three discursive identification strategies employed by members during the organizational change. The first of which was comparison between the organizational characteristics prior to the change and those new organizational characteristics resulting from the change in organizational goals. Participants compared benefits and problems between the new goals and old goals, often
giving case in point comparisons between the two. Employees also used a tactic of reconciliation in which they attempted to align the two seemingly opposite value systems so they could function together. Another strategy the employees utilized was logic, presenting rational justifications for their identification choices (Larson & Pepper, 2003). The third strategy that was used by the employees to express their identification decisions was support. Support can come in the form of direct support, implied support, or through a strategy known as the “assumed we.” The backing of others leads to stronger organizational identification as discussed earlier. The “assumed we” often comes from management and is a tactic to help “employees and managers manage competing targets/sources of identification as it served as a subtle form of support for reinforcing identity preferences” (Larson & Pepper, 2003, p. 549). By using the word “we” instead of “I”, a sense of group can be created based on the linguistic nature of the words.

The case study of Larson and Pepper researched an organization which was forced to change its identification because of market strains. The company decided it would be unable to compete in the market if it did not change its focus from one of technical excellence to one where cost and schedule were more important. Interesting to note, as in the case study performed by Larson and Pepper, the current study questions whether organizational members choose to leave an organization as they struggle to identify with the new company values. The current case study adds to Larson and Pepper’s in that the organization was not forced to make the change in mission based on customer demands. Instead, the organization chose to adapt its practices in order to align with an emerging social value.
This idea of commitment and organizational identification was measured by an earlier study by Sass and Canary (1991). The authors highlight the idea of attitudinal commitment to the organization which they define as “devotion and loyalty to one’s employing firm” (Sass & Canary, 1991, p. 276). Some debate exists whether organizational commitment and organizational identification are indeed the same concept with different names or if there are enough distinctions to study them as two separate constructs. For the purpose of this study, the researcher believes employee commitment is a direct result of the level of organizational identification felt by the employee. Sass and Canary’s study (1991) sought to clarify the conceptual and thus operational links between organizational commitment and organizational identification by noting the similarities and differences between the two.

The authors noted “identification with the goals of various organizational targets is central to the study of organizational identification” (Sass & Canary, 2001, p.290). In order for an organization to create strong identification with organizational goals, the organization must place a strong emphasis on those goals by communicating those goals to its employee membership.

Of importance to the study of organizational behavior is that social identification within organizations is not simply a study of the multiple interpersonal relationships within that organization, but an in-depth look into the psychological ties that an individual has to the group’s beliefs, characteristics, and norms (Turner, 1985). The communication processes occurring within the organization are the building blocks for these psychological ties, aligning personal beliefs with those of the group through
membership. The current study examines a particular organization’s strategy for increasing employee identification.

The focus of the current study was on the trend of environmentally friendly organizational rhetoric, in particular organizational mission statements, and the statements affect on employee behavior. Using the employees of small printing company, this study explored the correlation between a mission statement of sustainability and behaviors of eco-friendliness. Based upon the extant literature’s connection with an environmentally conscientious organization, the following research question is posed:

RQ: How, if at all, do environmentally friendly organizational mission statements assist in organizational identification amongst employees regarding environmental issues?
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Interpretive methods have been used in the study of organizational communication since the early 1980’s (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Like larger cultures, organizations develop unique languages, have subcultures which can be viewed as in-groups and out-groups within the boundaries of the organization and are compared with other organizations in order to set themselves apart. Interpretive methods can be beneficial to the study of organizations because they can explore employee commitment and identification helping members to “identify and resolve pressing problems, reflect on the premises that guide sensemaking, and develop cultures that successfully balance the tension between individual and organizational goals” (Kreps & Herndon, 2001, p. 7). Interpretive methodology provides a richness of data to the study of organizational identification that is often unmet in previous studies which employ mostly quantitative methods.

According to Baxter and Babbie (2004), qualitative research strives “to paint a verbal picture so rich that readers of the study feel as if they had walked that mile in the shoes of group members” (p. 62). The current research is a case study of a small printing company in Bowling Green, KY, Liberty Printing. Case studies are a qualitative research method in which a specific case, in this instance an organization, is examined. Analysis of communication, internal and external as well as nonverbal and verbal is studied in order to gain fresh insight into the specific communication strategies of the particular case (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). While the researcher had a particular question in mind, the exploration of organizational identification by employees to an organizational mission
statement, observation of the organization provided a varied description of what is actually going on within the organization. Therefore, as the researcher observed the specific communication strategies of the organization, the researcher discovered unique communication discourse which prior to observation was not the focus of the research. The very nature of qualitative methods often leads to new research questions during the course of data collection (Baxter & Babbie, 2004).

As the researcher was particularly interested in identification with an organization which focuses on environmental sustainability, the current organization was specifically sought because of its mission of “Live Green, Print Green.” The researcher obtained written permission from the Vice-President of the Liberty Group Printing to use the organizational name in the study.

Liberty Group is a print communications company who “Lives Green so you can Print Green” (www.libertygrouponline.com). The company employs fourteen employees including management, designers, printing specialists, and delivery personnel. The company displays its unique position of environmental sustainability within the printing industry from its website which proudly displays the mission statement, to the green eco-friendly vehicles with which they deliver their material, to the statement of “Live Green, Print Green” which is printed on the casing of their products. The organization has chosen to distinguish itself from other printing organizations by taking a stance on environmental sustainability. The idea of eco-friendly print solutions from an organization that uses many of the world’s resources to create their medium, paper is almost unheard of in the printing industry. Very few organizations outside of the current case choose to make a commitment to the environment when this commitment will
substantially affect their profit margin. However, the philosophy of the Liberty Group is to offer their customers the highest level of satisfaction with their product while still being environmentally conscious. By conducting a case study of Liberty Group Printing, the researcher hoped to shed light on the organization’s mission of eco-friendliness and how employees identify with the mission by painting a picture of the communication strategies the organization employs.

Prior to discussion of methods which are utilized in this study, it is important to note the strategies utilized by past researchers. The primary source of data in organizational identification studies thus far has been from the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (OIQ) or similar questionnaires constructed from the OIQ. The OIQ was first utilized by Tompkins and Cheney in 1983 as an “analysis of organizational members’ accounts of their decision-making premises” (Miller et al, 2000, p. 629). While the OIQ has been utilized by many researchers in the field of organizational identification, the questionnaire does have limitations. For instance, the unidimensionality of the questionnaire has been questioned because “only one quarter of the OIQ’s items loaded highest on the primary factor” (Miller, et al, 200, p. 634). The OIQ’s reliability is also questionable as it has not been extensively tested and retested across different organizations at different times. While the OIQ is not utilized for this study, it is important to note because the questionnaire has been the foundation for many organizational identification studies. The current study does not seek to generalize findings across a population as the studies utilizing OIQs intend, instead seeking to describe the phenomenon of organizational identification in a specific organization at the current point in time. Thus, interpretive methods are appropriate for this research. As
Miller et al (2000) suggested in their critique of the OIQ, future organizational identification studies should examine verbal behaviors in the workplace which lead to employee identification with the employer’s mission. The current study sought to accomplish this goal through employee interviews. As mentioned previously, the use of qualitative methods allows flexibility in the research to describe what is occurring within the organization without limiting the findings to the specifics of organizational identification as the sole motivation behind employee communication about the mission statement.

Participants

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, participants for the study were selected based upon their employment with Liberty Group Printing. Permission was obtained from the Vice President to interview each of the fourteen employees of Liberty Group Printing on site in a private board room. As qualitative studies focus on social practices and meanings of people in particular situations, it is unnecessary to sample in a way that tries to gain a representative sample of a particular population. Each employee was interviewed to gain the greatest scope of identification amongst all employees regardless of position or length of employment. The researcher sought out every employee of the small printing company, including full-time to part-time employees, management to receptionists, and those who have been with the organization for over twenty years to those who have less than six months experience. By interviewing each of the employees, the researcher gained a more complete knowledge of the employee identification at all levels of the organization. A total of fourteen interviews were conducted including six females and eight males. Thirteen of the
participants were Caucasian and one participant was African-American. Participants were not asked their age, however, tenure with the organization ranged from six months to twenty-three years.

**Data Collection**

Data collection began in early February through on-site interviews. Between interviews, the guidelines listed in documents from the Sustainable Forest Initiative (SFI) and Forest Sustainability Council (FSC) organizations were reviewed. The SFI and FSC are organizations dedicated to the preservation of the world’s natural resources and outline the steps necessary to operate an organization more environmentally friendly. The company did not allow these materials off site. However, the researcher utilized these documents as a spring board for follow-up interview questions.

**Document Analysis**

Documents are often hard copies of the organizational communication passed within and throughout the company. Documents can be a rich source of data for the researcher in establishing the goals and priorities of the organization. Documents “often embody social rules that govern how members of a social collective should behave” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 117). In the current study, organizational documents were utilized to detail the history of the organizational change in mission as well as emphasis on environmental sustainability. Some documents were also used to generate interview questions. As Liberty is credentialed by two organizations, the SFI and the FSC, which specifically seek out eco-friendly companies, the forms and applications that were used to achieve this accreditation, were reviewed to see how the organization views the employee role in environmental sustainability.
Individual Interviews

Individual interviews elicit open-ended responses from players within the organization. The current study utilized semi-structured interviews which will be discussed in more depth. Responses are from a personal perspective and seek to “determine what influenced a person to form an opinion or to act in a certain way and to classify complex attitude patterns” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 178). Individual interviews allowed participants to explain in their own words the motivations behind their actions.

Once participants for the study were identified, individual interviews with the participants began. This study utilized individual interviews because “interviews have an advantage over questionnaires, in that the interviewer can use probes to elicit relevant information or ask follow-up questions to obtain more detail about topics raised by the participant” (Noller & Feeney, 2004, p. 31). Interviews were conducive to this study because they allowed the researcher to reach a greater depth with the participants and allowed the employees to tell their stories. This allowed for a participant perspective which enriched the research study.

Of particular interest to the current study is the way in which social actors produce explanation for their behaviors. As the organization has recently experienced a change in mission, the focus of the interview questions was to elicit explanations of how employees integrated their former attitudes and behaviors with the new organizational goals. An explanation of member behavior in their recycling habits was solicited by the researcher. Interviews are often used to inquire about the past. As the researcher was not
present during the organizational transformation, subjects’ accounts of the transformation were taken into consideration.

Each interview began with introductions of the participant and the researcher. The participants were informed the research would focus on the identification of employees with organizational values in an environmentally-friendly company. The researcher informed the participants for research purposes, the interviews would be tape recorded with their consent and later transcribed.

After reviewing a Participant Consent form (see Appendix A) and discussing the benefits and potential risks of the study, the subjects were asked if they were still interested in participating in the voluntary interview. Confidentiality was addressed in the form. Once their participation was agreed upon, the researcher obtained participant’s signatures noting their willingness to participate in the study and the interview continued. If a participant chose not to participate in the study, his/her refusal was noted and there were no further consequences for that employee. A participant consent form is important in conducting research especially related to employee communication in that this research may directly relate to their livelihood within the organization. Results reflected their actual relationships within the organization and thus may have an effect on the future of their communication patterns. Pseudonyms were created at the beginning of the interview to protect the anonymity of the participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). To foster good will, the researcher offered the participants the choice of creating their own pseudonyms. However, all participant’s declined the offer and the researcher assigned pseudonyms at the beginning of the individual interviews.
Semi-structured interviews utilizing an interview guide (See Appendix B) were used to allow for open-ended answers and elicitation of participant narratives relating to their own experiences within the organization, a method suggested by Lindlof and Taylor (2002). This interview technique allows for flexible wording of questions and follow-up questions to participant responses (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

The questions in the interview sought to address the research questions of this study. The interview began with questions providing a general overview of the participants’ experiences within the organization. Tenure with the organization and the participants’ roles were discussed. Subjects’ background information was obtained to encourage a more open relationship between the researcher and the participants. Based on their response, follow-up questions were asked.

Participants were asked to characterize their communication patterns within their organization and the effect of these organizational messages on their attitudes and behaviors both at work and outside of work. Employees’ opinions of the organizational mission change were discussed. Next, each respondents were asked to discuss his/her opinion of whom or what the driving force of the organizational mission change encompassed. Subjects’ attitudes and behaviors towards recycling were addressed. Benefits and challenges of organizational membership were also questioned. Again, follow-up questions were asked as necessary. Finally, participants were asked if they had any concluding remarks or suggestions of areas for the researcher to focus.

Individual interviews lasted between four minutes to fifteen minutes depending on the breadth and depth of respondent answers and the amount of follow-up questions that were deemed necessary by the researcher. Participants did not receive monetary
compensation for their voluntary participation, but interviews were conducted at their convenience and at a location agreeable to the participant. Each participant consented to be interviewed in the boardroom provided.

Throughout the individual interviews, the researcher took field notes which highlighted key points of the interview, as well as emerging themes from the discussion. The researcher noted any biases on the researcher’s behalf in the field notes. Collection of data took place the week of February 16, 2009 based upon availability of the employees. At the discretion of Liberty Group, employee interviews were conducted around work schedules.

Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The recorded interviews resulted in twenty-nine single-spaced pages of transcriptions. Upon transcription of the interview data, emergent themes within the transcripts were analyzed by the researcher. The document analysis was used to align the goals of the organization with those provided by the participants. Thematic analysis, which looks for themes which emerge based on recurrence, repetition and forcefulness in textual data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), was utilized to create categories of data. These categories encompass those participant’s responses that are similar in nature. This categorization is known as the constant comparative method, which involves “sorting similar units into the same category and generating a category label” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 374). Once categories emerged, the researcher then created codes which further sorted the data into usable information with which the researcher drew conclusions. Throughout the data analysis, the researcher came up with numerous categories, some of which were utilized
for the findings and some of which were eliminated because they did not reflect the true nature of the data. Categories such as cost/benefit analysis were evident throughout the interview process but did not encompass employee motives. Instead, an economy theme shed a greater amount of light on how the employees felt about the cost of recycling as well as placing blame on the current economic situation for less eco-friendly practices. Other categories which were eliminated or tweaked include attitude which later was encompassed by pride in organization and behavior which was further defined as personal behavior. Two initial categories, awareness and education became one theme as awareness often led directly to education. This connection will be discussed in the findings section of this study.

Thematic analysis allows the data to speak for itself, without confining the responses to the research question (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Six themes emerged from participant interviews in the current study including Prototype/Driving Force, Internal Awareness and Education, In-group/Out-group, Economy, Personal Behavior, and Pride in Organization.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This findings section will address the research question: How, if at all, do environmentally friendly organizational mission statements assist in organizational identification amongst employees regarding environmental issues? Based upon participant responses, six themes emerged from the data including a Prototype/Driving Force, Internal Awareness and Education, In-group/Out-group, Economy, Personal Behavior, and Pride. As was evident from participant responses, an individual emerged as the Driving Force behind the “Going Green” movement at Liberty Printing. This theme includes the employees’ proclamation of the individual’s prototypical leadership and the ways in which this individual motivates employees to live by the mission statement. The Internal Awareness and Education focuses on the employees desire to become more aware of the issue and educate themselves on the importance of environmental sustainability. The In-group/Out-group theme relates to the notion of member behavior where the levels of awareness and education concerning environmental sustainability place an individual as either an in-group member or a target of educational messages. The Economy theme included both the repercussions to the organization and the cost and benefits for the individual employees. Next, the Personal Behavior theme of the findings detail the actions the employees either continued, discontinued, or initiated as a result of the change in mission at Liberty Group Printing. Finally, the Pride in Organization theme denotes employees’ views of recycling and other environmentally sustainable processes, as well as their attitudes towards individuals who chose not to recycle. A reoccurring theme in the data was a sense of pride in the organization for
making this statement towards environmental sustainability. In this chapter, participant responses which led to the six emerging themes are reviewed. Many of the participants had similar responses when discussing the organizational communication strategies which made emerging themes fairly easy to discern and led to a saturation of data within the group of participants.

Prototype/Driving Force

Hogg and Terry (2000) noted a prototype is often an exemplary member of a society that embodies the values, attitudes and belief structures of a particular group. In the current case study, a prototypical leader emerged through the research. Every participant in the study discussed the Vice-President of the organization as the driving force behind the “going green movement.” For example, when asked who or what the driving force behind the movement, was a relatively new employee, Tiffani, quickly responded by identifying the Vice-President. Follow-up discussion centered on how the Vice-President communicated with the customers of the organization to encourage them to print sustainably. Tiffani noted:

Well she is just a very persuasive person. She comes up front with the customers and tells them, you know we are green, you can get jobs done this way and once people hear that they are intrigued by it and they want to hear more and she is more than willing to tell them all about it.

This notion of creating awareness and then educating those members who are out-group members to the environmental movement will be discuss later in the findings section.

Shawn, an employee for a little over two years, expanded on the notion of a driving force to include societal factors, “I think probably the media in general would be
the driving force across the board just making everyone more aware of what is going on.’” Within the organization, he credits the Vice-President as being the motivation, “Here, I think it’s been mostly Rachel that has been spearheading any contact information that needs to be shared.” George, one of Liberty’s newest employees, reiterated this notion by saying, “It’s pretty much just Rachel wanting to give back to the environment by printing smarter.”

Cody, an employee who has witnessed many changes in the organization throughout his tenure, takes each change with stride and humor. When asked how the Vice-President persuades him to be more environmentally sustainable, he chuckled, “She orders.” In actuality:

She said this is the direction we are going to go because she is a part owner in the company and one of the vice presidents or presidents, I don’t know what her official title is, but, she was the driving force, and she said this is the direction we need to try to go, and I understand, and at the time, you know no one could foresee the economy really tanking.

Cody’s response also hints towards one other finding of the study: identification with the mission statement of “Live Green, Print Green” is dependent upon economical factors, which will be discussed later.

The Vice-President realizes the role she has played in driving the company to more sustainable printing. When asked what drove her to the decision to be more environmentally friendly, she shared the following statement:
Well actually, about 2 ½ years ago, I researched it and what we could do to make a difference. There wasn’t a lot of information out there for printers so it was a lot digging about what we could do to make a difference.

Her commitment to the cause started when she was first made aware of the issue and was strengthened once she investigated the cost and benefit of the move towards sustainability.

In Lee’s (2001) discussion of leader-member exchange, the researcher credited the amount of contact between leader and member as having a great impact on the level of identification members feel towards organizational goals. In the current study, the prototypical leader is involved in the everyday transactions of the organization. As the organization is very small with fourteen employees, there is a greater amount of leader-member exchange than would normally be present in a larger organization. Not only does Liberty’s leader drive the mission of the organization, she also is the primary communicator about how the mission can be achieved, both to employees and customers. Sara, who works closely with the Vice-President and the customers of Liberty Group, discussed how the mission statement was communicated to her:

Well, it was just kind of discussed that it might be an option, something that we were going to start doing. Then Rachel pretty much told us that we were going to be starting this new campaign and then we adopted it and started learning about it. While there was group discussion about the change in mission, the Vice-President enforced the change.

Shawn reiterated the notion of a group movement towards sustainability discussing the change in mission stemming from having “a meeting on it, a group
meeting. I thought it was a good change to make, anything that is going to help the environment.” Michael, an employee with over a decade of tenure noted, “Basically, it was the direction we were going to go.” Rafael, an employee who puts the finishing touches on many of Liberty’s print jobs noted, “While I mean, that is really all we do. I say ninety percent of all we print is on recycled paper, post consumer waste depending on how much percentage. It’s all on recycled paper.” He noted the motivation to be more environmentally friendly is engrained in the everyday business practices of Liberty Group, “It’s not hard because it is really all we do. I mean its motivation every day.”

As is the nature of prototypical leaders, the Vice-President leads by example. Randy, a Liberty employee with over twenty years on the job, believed the VP encouraged her employees to “Live Green, Print Green” by setting a personal example of how the effort can be advanced. He stated the VP does, “More of a recycling effort, using recycle content paper, environmentally friendly practices, and ensuring FSC & SFI (Forest Stewardship Council and Sustainable Forest Initiative) Certification.” The Vice-President’s example causes Shawn to pay closer attention to how his job effects the environment:

I keep a tighter watch on the jobs we print so there is less waste. If we make a mistake on a job and you have to go back and redo the print job, there is more waste. That is the big thing: get it right the first time and you won’t have to waste a bunch of paper reprinting it.

The employees are encouraged to pay attention to detail in the early stages of the jobs in order to prevent waste in the later stages.
Betsy, a recent addition to Liberty Group Printing, also credited the Vice-President as being the initiator of the environmentally sustainable change in mission. “This has been her baby.” While she credited the Vice-President with making the mission statement meaningful to both the employees and the customers, she also recognizes how the VP enables others to take an active role in encouraging the organization’s customers to be more environmentally sustainable:

She’s just enthusiastic about it and passionate about being responsible. I (Betsy) am the one who has to be the spokesperson and I am the one who has to talk to people about going green. She will start talking to them and then she will push them my way. I’ve gotten involved in the community in the sense of getting other businesses involved in quote the green movement. We have formed the Green Business Partnership and we’ve gotten the city and the county behind that and hopefully the Chamber of Commerce. We are looking at late spring early summer seeing that kicked off in our community and to encourage other businesses to participate in recycling.

While Rachel is the primary driving force, it is the responsibility of the employees to carry out the day-to-day tasks of making their organization environmentally sustainable.

When discussing the challenges of becoming a more environmentally friendly organization, Nick noted, “No I mean really it’s not a challenge, you know, it’s just change, basically, and you have to adjust to change.” Once a prototypical leader, in this case the organization’s Vice-President, communicates a revised mission statement to organizational members, a process of identification begins by first creating an internal awareness amongst employees. Following the Vice-President’s example, many
employees sought out information about how they could become more environmentally friendly as evident by their responses. These information seeking behaviors amongst employees led to the next emerging theme of internal awareness and thus a need to become educated on the issue.

*Internal Awareness and Education*

As was noted earlier, awareness of environmental issues has invaded the American public’s communication habits, calling not only upon individuals but also organizations and governments to make changes to ensure our environment will be healthy for the generations of people to come. This increased spotlight on the environmental sustainability sparked the interest of the current organization’s leader to investigate the issue further. The Vice-President of the organization took steps to become more aware of the issues facing environmental sustainability and the steps her organization could take in advancing the cause. Rachel became more aware of the issue of environmental sustainability through literature distributed by accrediting organizations:

I read the publications that I get from organizations within our industry. A couple of years ago, a lot of focus was put on printers by the FSC and SFI, Forest Stewardship Council and Sustainable Forest Initiative because once again because printers can make such a difference on our environment.

Through rhetoric distributed by the FSC and SFI on the forefront of environmental preservation, Rachel became aware that an issue existed and sought out education on the topic. She then communicated the importance of environmental sustainability to her employees.
Awareness of an issue will often lead to information seeking as many of the employees noted in their interviews. At Liberty Group, the employees are required by the management to learn environmentally friendly processes and consequences. In turn, the members educate the organization’s customers about the choices they have in printing more environmentally-friendly.

Sara discussed the education process:

Ever since we’ve adopted the mission, it’s been a huge learning process and I feel like I’ve learned a lot about it and become pretty familiar with the recycling campaign and recycling efforts and the FSC and SFI campaign that go along with the recycling efforts. I feel I am pretty confident in my knowledge.

Participants discussed the processes of meeting FSC and SFI certification. Candice, an employee with twelve years of experience, says the organization is still learning what it means to practice environmentally friendly printing:

Well the whole process is new to us so we are still in the learning curve. We do try to fill it right, but of course we have only been doing it a year, and we only had four jobs in that year so there are some errors that we make. But now that we have made them and I believe we have learned from them.

Through a trial and error education process, Candice believes that she is capable of performing her work tasks in an environmentally-friendly manner.

Tiffani described how she received a “crash course” on printing environmentally friendly:
“Randy in the back gave me a little class on paper on recycled paper, how they make it in the mill and what they do with it and all of that. From what I understand, all the employees went through it.”

She even discussed a test the employees take to make sure they are aware of the necessary procedures to meet FSC and SFI standards. The crash course made her think of printing environmentally friendly from a new perspective:

Well, I think the Live Green, Print Green, you know you always learn about recycling and you should do this and this but you never really think that you can print and it won’t be bad for the environment. I don’t really know how to explain that well. People always say “oh, you work at a green printing company? Just don’t print stuff, it just doesn’t make sense.” Well, you have to print things, you have to have things printed but there is a way that you can do that isn’t instead of just cutting down a forest.

Tiffani’s description of her crash course not only relates to her educational experience, but also highlights the importance the organization places on eco-friendly practices. The organization takes time to provide every employee with this lesson in the “green” process. George recalls his education with laughter, “Oh, I got the crash course.”

Prior to the mission of “Live Green, Print Green”, Nick was unaware of the importance of environmental sustainability. Before changing the mission, Nick noted the motto was, “Anything goes, we really weren’t aware of how many papers there were, like the percentages of types of paper, we just didn’t pay any attention to it.” He thought changing to more environmentally friendly processes was “a good idea, that it would be a different marketing tool that would help bring in business, that people are being more
aware of the environment now and then it kind of helped me of being more aware of the environment.” As is the nature of organizational identification, Nick learned the desired attitudes of the organization and adapted his own recycling efforts to align with those of the organization’s mission.

Cody credited his employment with Liberty Group as increasing his awareness of the importance of preserving our environment:

I think it heightens an awareness that we don’t need to use and toss away. I do think it does that. This place is only going to last so long and we better take care of it. It’s just like your home. You know if you don’t take care of your home, it becomes kind of trashy.

Cody is like many of the employees who credit heightened awareness to group membership. Amy had similar feelings, “You look at things different. You think more about ways to not waste and to recycle.”

Sara agreed that if not for her employment with Liberty, she would probably be unaware of the effect she has on our environment:

I definitely would not be as aware. The knowledge that I have gained from being an employee here about recycling and the environmental benefits it has, I wouldn’t be aware. And honestly, I probably wouldn’t have taken the time to find out about it on my own. So this effort has in a way forced me to become aware.

But it has been a good force.

By shedding light on the issue of environmental sustainability, Rachel has encouraged her employees to take a closer look at their behaviors and question their behavior in light of being more eco-friendly.
Notably, just because an individual is aware there is an issue does not necessarily translate into a commitment to that cause. George, an employee who places less emphasis on the environment than his fellow employee Tiffani, declared his lack of awareness often prevents him from recycling, “That is the last thing I think about, I know it’s terrible, but that is the last thing I think about, I know it’s bad.”

However, he agreed if not for his employment at Liberty, environmental issues, “would have never crossed my mind.” As George is one of the newest employees, his time at Liberty may increase his awareness of the issue and he may place more importance on being environmentally friendly.

Through education, often times provided by the organization itself, employees discover how they can do their part in becoming more environmentally friendly. Liberty’s socialization process encourages in-group membership by building a commitment to organizational goals through educating its members. Once employees have acquired knowledge concerning environmental sustainability, a potential for in-group/out-group mentality arises as those in the know become members of the in-group and others become outsiders.

In-group/Out-group

Awareness of the issues facing an environmentally sustainable future may separate group members into in-groups and out-groups. Chris, an employee who has been with Liberty for four years, recognized when the change in mission occurred, nonverbal cues where provided for not only the employees but the customers as well, “Everyone was made aware of it when we made the change about a year ago. And of course we have all the signs and posters around the building. And (the building) is
painted different, (we have a) new logo, the whole remake.” He noted the change in mission was a group effort, “We all kind of jumped on board and we all do our part with the recycling.” With the changes, came awareness that Liberty was different from other printing companies in regards to value structures, in particular the emphasis on the environment.

Rachel discussed why the importance on changing the physical image of Liberty Group was so important to the cause, “We were changing internally. I wanted it to be displayed outside with the logo and the theme. If you are going to live it, if you are going to say it, do it. We try to live that here.”

The education process is ongoing and often transfers from the organization’s members to Liberty’s customers. The Vice-President outlined how customers were educated towards the organization’s recycling efforts and how those efforts were used in sales pitches:

Probably, that’s, and I am glad you brought that up, that’s the biggest thing that we face. We literally have to educate our customers because they think oh recycling, well that is going to cost me twice as much if I choose a recycle paper. Years ago, that was the case. I mean, recycle was so much more expensive. But now, we’re talking depending on the stock 5% difference. If you’re talking 500 brochures, that is neglegible. And then, not only do we say we can choose a paper that’s 10%, 20%, 30%, 100%, so not only say, get them to commit to recycle, okay now we can also let them choose what percentage they are willing to commit to. And yes, the higher the percentage, the more it does cost.
Rachel’s response highlights the communication strategies that Liberty uses to disperse the organization’s values to outside constituents.

While the employees of Liberty were very aware of the issues facing our environment and the steps they take to be more eco-friendly, they agreed that the general public may be less knowledgeable. Amy believed that, “a lot of people have no idea what green means” and it is the organization’s responsibility to educate their customers on its importance. Sara agreed her role involves educating her clients on the importance of environmentally friendly processes:

I think it is a personal choice. Personally I think it is a positive choice. All I can do as an employee is to educate the customer as much as I can and to inform them of the positive benefits that it has and then it is up to them to make the decision. I just feel it is my responsibility to educate. (Recycling) is a positive thing and we try to educate as many customers as we can and hope they choose to make the same decision and print with us because of that as well.

While one of Sara’s primary roles within the organization is to educate customers, she is not alone in this task. Amy hoped the education process will result in customers choosing Liberty for printing needs.

Liberty employees believed that an increased awareness amongst customers is necessary to carry out the eco-friendly mission. Nick discussed the goal of the change in organizational mission, “I think they are trying to associate our name with helping the environment and then also trying to make customers who wouldn’t normally be aware of what is offered in the way of recycled paper and helping the environment.”
One concept of organizational identification is the notion group membership builds self-esteem. In the current case study, employees discussed how their behaviors led to a feeling of doing their part. Rachel discussed how the decision to change to the mission of “Live Green, Print Green” was reached:

It’s just the right thing to do. Printers have so much control over what they offer their clients. I don’t care if someone prints with me or not, but at least request recycled, do your part. I’ve had other printers ask “why are you doing this?” We do this because we can make such a big difference. We have the opportunity and we should do it. One thing I say is this is the right thing to do.

Her response questioned the lack of commitment to the environment other printing organizations exhibit. There is clearly an in-group/out-group distinction in which those who utilize environmentally friendly practices are superior to those who do not. Rachel questioned why other organizations within the industry do not feel the same commitment to the environment:

I don’t know why they don’t. I mean, it is such an easy thing to do. Do they not care? It makes me feel good that we are the leader with the industry and that we have taken a stance and we are not just living green, we are printing green.

Even in interview responses, Rachel reinforced the organization’s mission of “Live Green, Print Green.” Tiffani reiterated this questioning of those who choose not to recycle:

I have never had a bad opinion of people who choose not to recycle, and I just wonder why they don’t. Because it is not like a tedious task, you just throw it in a
bin, and they come and pick it up. It is very easy. I just wonder why they refuse
to do it.

Tiffani’s distinction of in-group and out-group members is evident throughout the
employee responses, noting that the actions of group members are superior to that of
outsiders. Shawn believed recycling is “the right choice to make,” crediting his role in
the organization as leading to his current attitude, “I think that (being part of the
organization) reinforces the fact that is the right thing to do.” Many employees
discussed this notion of right and wrong and how the behaviors of organizational
members were right.

Nick exhibited frustration towards those who chose not to make the environment
a priority, “it bugs me to see someone throw stuff out of their car, littering. I hunt and
fish, to see that stuff in the woods or on the lake, it aggravates me.” He believes if not for
his employment with Liberty, he, “Probably wouldn’t recycle.”

Tiffani’s awareness of Liberty Group mission was the reason she sought out
employment with the environmentally friendly organization:

Well, the day I interviewed, they just told me about it (organization’s mission of
Live Green, Print Green). Well, first they asked why I wanted to work here. I
had known they were green and I am all about being green. I recycle and I have
done this forever, so I told them one of the reasons I wanted to work here is
because they were green. They had told me why they went green, when they did
it and what that involves throughout the company. I thought to myself, ooh, I
really want to work here.
She sought out group membership because of the organization’s commitment to “going green.” Before employment with Liberty Group Printing, Tiffani already possessed an internal awareness of the issue of environmental sustainability. During her interview for employment, her values were reinforced by the organizational members making her desire to be employed with the organization even stronger.

Not only is it important the employees are aware of the benefits of being more environmentally friendly, it is imperative their customers are also aware of their stance on practices that will help protect the environment. The notion of the employee becoming a prototypical leader in the environmental movement to outsiders shows an in-group has formed and that the goal is to encourage out-group members to act in accordance with the prototype. This urge to make outsiders aware and educate out-group members about the importance of environmentally friendly practices shows organizational identification has occurred within Liberty Group Printing. When Tiffani discussed her awareness of Liberty’s environmental practices, she detailed:

It means we are taking, printers are some of your biggest wastes, when it comes to paper, of course, and it is showing that we are putting forth the effort. Yes, we know that people need to print; I mean paper printing is a fact in any business. But do it responsibly. Do it environmentally friendly and Liberty is here to help you do that and we are doing it ourselves, we are recycling our wastes, we are using soy inks, we’re using recycled stock, we are a part of the SFC and SFI. Tiffani recognizes the effect printers can have on the environment and the steps necessary to be more eco-friendly. She has taken part in the employee education process and is
doing her part to communicate the importance of eco-friendly practices. Cody gave the researcher her very own crash course during the interview:

So it’s the same thing with our forests, they are very well managed and the question I get is why is recycled paper so much higher? Well you are adding another step to the process. One tree equals this sheet of paper, after that, you go to recycle this paper, you have to pull the pulp that is in the paper out, and so there is a process. And then you have to discard the rest. Well you’re not going to get a sheet’s worth of pulp here. Theoretically, you are going to have to take four sheets of paper to get one sheet of recycled paper. So that’s why you have three different categories, you have, they call it virgin which is complete and you have mixed sources, which is some recycled content, it could be as little as 5% but most likely you have ten and then you have full recycled. 100%. And that is why recycled paper is higher, because you are adding another process. Cody concluded, I feel confident in the mission, I know what is trying to be accomplished, I am very familiar with it. Just, something we are trying to print on recycled paper, trying to use recyclable inks, soy based inks and everything. What a lot of people don’t realize is according to the EPA, 99% of the inks, printing inks that are used now are soy based.

This notion of educating outsiders encourages individuals to become in-group members. Betsy, a salesperson for Liberty Printing, also highlighted the importance of educating customers and making them feel as though they can make a difference:

We use our soy inks, we try to educate our customers on the importance of printing green, of using more environmentally friendly inks, papers, those types of
things, and educating them on what the SFC and SFI are. I think in our community it’s more about the education process, a lot of people don’t understand the importance and how easy it is to help the environment and that’s the key, is on educating people on how simple it is. And for instance, they’re printing stuff, so print it on 10% recycled and you’ve done a little bit.

By educating outsiders, Betsy hopes to expand an in-group mentality which favors environmentally friendly printing habits.

Environmentally friendly-centered behavior outside the organization is also an indicator an in-group has formed amongst the employees of Liberty Printing. The employees are conscious of the mission to “Live Green, Print Green” not only in their workplace, but throughout their personal lives. Cody discussed his own efforts in carrying the mission into his other roles, including his efforts as a volunteer fire department. He discussed his efforts:

I am a chief of a local volunteer fire department. We have a deal set up with Southern Kentucky Recycling where we have recycle bins set up for the communities that we service set up at our stations. The community uses (these bins) quite a bit.

Even though Cody has continued the effort to be more environmentally sustainable, he believed he could be doing more, “I am aware, could I do more? Well yeah, who couldn’t? But, we do some.” Recycling efforts has become a priority to Cody as he seeks to make others part of the in-group by communicating about the importance of environmental sustainability. This desire to include others in his recycling effort shows Cody is committed to a more sustainable lifestyle.
Betsy’s commitment to recycling has also been integrated into her other roles, including her role as a wife. She insists her husband recycle also, laughing as she recounts how he sometimes gets into trouble if he does not recycle, “my husband gets in trouble if I see him walking to the trash can with envelopes after he has checked the mail. I’m like “what are you doing?” He says, “Uh, uh, uh, I’m going to recycle this.” I say, “Yes you are, it is right outside.” When an outsider does not act in accordance with the in-group’s norm, those who identify with the mission of the organization will seek to modify the behavior of the outsider. In this case, Betsy reprimands her husband if he is less than environmentally friendly.

While many organizational members note a commitment to environmental sustainability, many mentioned the current economic situation has checked their enthusiasm for the cause. When discussing the drawbacks to recycling, many mentioned the cost not only financially but also an increased effort that may not be worth the benefits they gain. This idea of cost versus benefit is two-fold. It seems to hinder identification with the organization’s unique mission statement to some, while others try to place a positive spin on the cost of being more environmentally friendly.

**Economy**

Like Larson and Pepper’s study in 2003, the current organization made a change in their mission statement which modified their place in the market. As some of the participants noted, the change to printing on recycled paper increased the cost to their customers making the sales pitch a cost-benefit analysis of increased price compared to the idea of saving the environment. Through the course of the study, many participants noted how the change in mission has affected their organizations profitability thus
making it more difficult to commit to the mission statement. Randy noted the change to environmental friendliness, “could be a good thing but I think the problem with the recycled paper is it is much more expensive and a lot of people don’t want to pay that much more for it.” For the organization, he thought “it means a little bit of loss in customer base.” Randy believed there is little gained from the new recycling effort in today’s economy, “I think that right now, I don’t really see any benefits from it. If you offer it as an option I think maybe but if it is more we are running recycled paper no matter what, it costs more.”

Cody mimicked Randy’s sentiments:

At the time, I was excited about it. At the time. I was still a little unsure about it but I was excited about it because it was a new way to go with a new identity. But at the time, I was pretty excited about it. My thoughts now, I don’t know, they are kind of up in the air, especially with the softening economy. Recycled paper is higher than regular paper.

The cost of the new mission, in the minds of employees, seems to be outweighing the benefits to many of the organization’s customers during a time when economic prosperity is scarce and organization’s that utilize Liberty Printing are looking to cut cost.

Not only do the employees find the price aspect a barrier to the mission’s success, but there is also a lack of others following suit. Randy also noted “The availability of products from recycled content is a lot harder to find for certain papers. I purchase the paper too, certain stocks do not come in recycled and it is really hard to find a substitute.”

As other printing organizations have not joined suit in becoming more environmentally
friendly, there is little demand for paper manufacturers to produce recycled paper and thus there is less supply of paper for Liberty to utilize.

Shawn hoped the organizations commitment to the environmental movement will raise awareness amongst customers and bring Liberty business:

“Hopefully, we will attract more consumers that are trying to be more environmentally aware and make a smaller carbon foot print. They will print with us instead of someone else who doesn’t use recycled stock.”

By distinguishing Liberty from other printers, the desire is customers will view Liberty more favorably and choose the organization for printing needs, earning a greater profit for Liberty. This distinction affects the economic status of the organization. If customers do not see the distinction, they may choose a different printing company with lower costs.

This notion of an extended customer base excited Sara who said:

I think a lot of the community and state and country, I think a lot of people are moving towards (environmentally friendliness) anyways. I feel that we were kind of jumping on the bandwagon, early enough so it was still something new. You know a lot of people are becoming more aware and conscientious of recycling and how important it is.

Sara believes that the increased awareness about the importance of environmental sustainability with translate into a larger customer base. Sara’s response highlighted the societal movement in “going green” that was noted in the introduction of the paper. The employees of Liberty have taken note that a change is occurring and they want to be at the forefront of the movement.
Despite the economic pitfalls, the Vice-President of the organization believed the benefits outweigh the costs. While discussing how she motivates her employees to live by the mission statement, she took into account the increased cost while still renewing her commitment:

I have a lot of people here 15-20 years. The thing with printing is you buy the cheapest paper you can and you will resell the job and make more money. Does it cost me more to buy recycled? Yes it does. But I mean that is my commitment. I am going to do it. Even my copy paper is recycled. And nobody buys recycled copy paper because it is more. But anyway, we are hoping the few cents difference won’t be the deciding factor in winning a bid.

Despite the economic costs of printing on recycled behavior, Rachel hopes she can communicate the benefits to the environment well enough that customers will choose to use eco-friendly paper sources.

Many of the employees at Liberty Printing are vested in the mission of “Live Green, Print Green” and our optimistic about the future. Shawn believed “after the economy picks up, the economic benefits will be there for companies that bid to companies that print green.” He hoped the government’s new leadership will provide incentives for those organizations which produce products more sustainably. Candice agreed, “I believe in the long run, it will bring more business. We have had a few companies come because they noticed that we were green. And then recycling environmental stuff has really just started in the last couple of years.”

Some employees also discussed the benefit of green-collared jobs which could be created with more eco-centered societal norms. Amy believed not only will the
environment benefit from environmentally friendly practices, but the economy will be strengthened if more organizations become more conscientious, “I think that when you recycle, you give people jobs. There is less trash if everything is getting recycled and that takes people to pick it up.” The process of recycling itself will employ people and thus help out the economy.

The root of economic prosperity for the company relies on the organization’s members and their ability to educate its customers. Sara believed she is up to the task of communicating the importance of eco-friendly processes:

Really, it’s not that much more expensive either. People think if I choose recycling, it’s going to be a lot more expensive. But when we compare the cost, paper with post consumer waste versus not, it’s really not that much more. You know it may be a couple dollars but that couple dollars is well worth the effort and a smart choice as well.

Through education of the issue, Sara believed she can persuade Liberty’s customers to align their own belief structure with that of the organization.

According to Chris, the change in mission “was a smart move. As an organization we are trying to pick up some more marketing (through our mission). Hopefully it means more sales.” He felt this increased marketing of the environmental mission will work because, “It’s kind of a hot topic in the last few years and a lot of customers are looking for that. So hopefully it will translate into more sales and make more customers happy.” While some are unsure the change in mission will result not only in a more environmentally sustainable future but also a more economically sustainable organization, others are confident in the vision of the organization’s leader
that the commitment to the environment will result in increased sales and happier customers.

The economical considerations of employees may translate into in-group/out-group memberships amongst the employees. Those who are more optimistic about the future of the “green” printing company may have more leader-member exchanges as they work towards a more sustainable future while those who are skeptical about the cost may be outsiders within the organization. The development of an in-group/out-group amongst employees indicates that behavior may not solely be a result of force; instead it may be a result of stronger identification amongst some employees. This identification can be gauged by the personal behaviors of the organizational members.

**Personal Behavior**

As discussed in the literature review, individuals have multiple identities which they must manage. Not only were the participants of the current study employees of Liberty Group, they also have other roles which may be affected by the change in organizations mission. Many have to weigh the cost and benefits of environmental sustainability in their personal lives.

While Cody laughed when asked what does the statement of “Live Green, Print Green” mean to him outside of the organization, responding, “Nothing,” he still participates in recycling efforts outside of work. Cody leads a community-wide effort to recycle through his role in the fire department. He discussed the economic impact on him personally when he tries to recycle:

Obviously cost, it does cost more. And getting in the habit of saying I am going to redo this or recycle this. You have to perform something 29 times before it
becomes a habit, good or bad. Yes, going green is considerably more because of the added cost it takes to recycle.

However, as can be seen in the discussion of the economy, some organizational members saw value in being more eco-friendly.

Tiffani attempts to balance her personal cost with the benefits of being environmentally friendly. One of the challenges she faces is not using disposable products such as paper plates discussing how much easier it was to use these products instead of doing dishes. However, she believes she gains a sense of well being, like she has “done something good.” This notion of recycling to benefit the greater good is why she chooses to recycle.

Recycling allows Amy to feel as though she is a “part of something.” She reasoned:

I mean it is just as easy to not recycle as it is to, actually it is more effort to recycle really. You have to make a conscious decision to do that. I’m teaching my children to do that too. We have southern recycle pick up our recycled goods and then we have cans that we keep separate which I give to my mom because she recycles.

When asked if she sees herself like the VP of Liberty within her family, she responded, “Not to that extreme.” While she is making effort to align with the beliefs and practices of her organization, she distinguished between her efforts and those of the prototypical leader.

Nick attributed his behavior to employment with Liberty Group. He recycles all of his aluminum cans in order to take them to his daughter’s school. His family has also
started efforts to separate plastic and recyclable paper from his trash in order to take it to a recycling center. Because of Liberty, Nick is “more aware without even realizing it.” His efforts in being more environmentally sustainable are a result of the increased communication about the effort in his workplace which has led to a change in behavior for Nick.

Interesting to note is the fact every organizational member at Liberty Group printing, with the exception of the newest employee of the organization, discussed how they have either continued a recycling program in their own homes, have enacted one or have intent to begin one. Shawn discussed his decision making strategies at the grocery store, “I try to buy recycled items whenever I can. If there are two items sitting next to each other and one is recycled and one is not, I will go with the recycled one because it is a better choice.” Rachel also used the example of the grocery to note her recycling efforts, “When I go to the grocery I buy those bags that you reuse. I recycle plastic bottles, paper, and we never did that before.”

While many Liberty employees engage in eco-friendly practices, it is important to understand the reasoning behind their actions. Sara is persuaded to live more environmentally friendly through the:

policies we’ve adopted here at work. They are really positive policies, so I think just by setting the example here at work, it inspires you to want to do that, outside of work. Through the learning process, you learn all of the positive effects it has on the community, but just you know for the whole entire process, it just has a lot of positive effects. You know one person can actually make a difference if you know everybody joins in, than it can really make a difference.
Sara uses the policies established at work to be guiding principles for her behaviors outside of work.

While Michael already made an effort to recycle, he discussed how the effort at Liberty reinforces his desire to be more environmentally friendly, “I already do recycling and everything on my own. I recycle all of my paper and plastic and cans. It’s not much new or different for me. I’m just glad someone else is doing their part too. It is just what everybody is supposed to do. We have a little bin and we just fill it up every week and set it out on the curb.” This is not surprising given, Ashforth and Mael’s (1989) findings. They noted when a group chooses to support a cause the group members feel a heightened commitment to that cause. Because Liberty Group Printing has chosen to be committed to a recycling effort, the employees of the organization receive reinforcement that not only is their actions making a difference, but that others are also doing their part to achieve environmental sustainability.

A consideration of the economic implications which leads to personal behavior is evident in Chris’s response to why he chooses to recycle, “Honestly because it is on my bill and if I am going to pay for it, I am going to get something out of it. I mean, if it is going in the trash one way or the other.” If an individual feels as though the benefits are greater than the cost, their analysis will be evident by their behavior of whether they choose to be more environmentally friendly or not. As an organizational member they have the added pressure to conform to organizational pressures, however a good indicator or their identification are the behaviors they choose to carry on throughout the rest of their lives.
As the change happened prior to employment with Liberty, Tiffani discussed how the organization’s effort to recycle mimicked her own behavior and increased her desire to be part of the organization:

Prior to working here, I did recycle pretty much everything that I could. I did it when I was younger, my parents recycled. I can remember taking newspapers into elementary school lining them up and saying “we saved a tree with these newspapers.” I have always been interested in it.

In Tiffani’s instance, her role within the organization aligned with her personal desire to be more environmentally friendly, thus strengthening her identification with the organization’s mission.

Candice indicated the change in mission at Liberty Group Printing has affected her belief structures in the roles she fulfills in her personal life:

Since we have done this, I have started recycling at home. I recycle plastics, paper, and cans. I did it because if we are going to do it here, we need to do it at home at least a little, because that is just a double standard in my mind.

Candice’s response indicated a blending of identities between her work and personal roles.

Not only did participants note a distinct change in behavior as a result of the mission of “Live Green, Print Green,” a noticeable change in attitude was recognized during the course of this study.

Some Liberty employees may have stronger opinions than others when it comes to recycling. Cody distinguished between a commitment to preserving the environment and going to extremes:
I believe “to each his own.” If you do, I think it’s great. If you don’t (recycle), I don’t have a problem with that either. And there are each ends of the spectrum, there are those who are uber green, that tend to get on your nerves sometimes and there are folks that are just uber “I will use and throw it away and don’t care about it” that kind of gets on your nerves too.

Cody’s response highlighted an in-group/out-group mentality based on personal behavior. If one participates in recycling, their efforts are great. However, if an individual doesn’t care about the environment, they are looked upon disapprovingly by most of the employees of Liberty.

Often our work identities can affect our personal identities. Within the organization, a driving force such as a prototypical leader can motivate one to practice environmental sustainability. However, in one’s personal life, the driving force may be absent. Within the organization, employees may identify with the mission, however may have failed to modify their behavior outside of their organizational role. Sara detailed her struggles in attempting to live green:

Honestly, just doing it. The challenge in getting it set up and getting it organized and being committed to it because at home, there is just so much going on. It is the biggest challenge I think me and my husband face. But here at work, it is very inspiring, here at work we’ve had people to get us committed and getting us started so it has been easier. But at home we have everything going on. It sometimes gets a bit crazy. It’s hard just to sit down and organize it and get started and just get it pulled together.
Although Sara has a desire to start recycling, the driving force is absent in her personal life which has inhibited a change in behavior. In the case of Sara, she believed that she should modify her behavior, but hasn’t yet committed to the change:

Honestly, I have not done a whole lot outside of the organization. I have had thoughts about setting up bins out in the garage and organize it, but life gets in the way and it is hard to do that. So it’s not something I’ve carried outside of work as of yet, but it is something I would like for my husband and I to eventually do to set up and organize and get bins and recycle newspapers and plastics and glass.

Sara’s group membership in the organizational setting may demand she practice environmental awareness, but because there are not as strict consequences in her home life, she may have decided the cost (i.e. time and energy) outweigh the benefits of enacting a recycling program.

Many Liberty employees, with the exception of one employee, have carried a commitment to the environment outside of the workplace. This blurring of professional and personal identities shows that while organizational members may be forced to behave in a manner while in the work place they have chosen to mimic this behavior at home. Continuing these behaviors outside of the workplace suggests that identification with the organization’s mission has occurred. Another sign of this identification is the pride that employees related to be a part of Liberty Group Printing.

**Pride in Organization**

Ashforth and Mael (1989) noted individuals often choose organizational membership based upon the prestige of the organization. As Liberty Group Printing has set itself apart from the industry in making the commitment to environmental
sustainability, made of the participants highlighted the prestige it has not only brought to the organization but also themselves through their membership. Chris outlined the goals of Liberty, “We are trying to position ourselves within the market. We are more environmentally friendly than a lot of other print companies. We are trying to do our part to be responsible. Liberty is different from all of the others.” Again, an in-group/out group mentality exists, with employees believing themselves to be better than other companies because they have made the commitment to the environment.

This distinctive organizational identity makes it easier for employees to align themselves with the mission. Chris noted “I think Liberty has always been a leader in their market and they are continually looking to improve. That is something I look for in a company: A company that strives to be the best. That’s important to me.”

When discussing Liberty’s position within the market, Sara highlighted the distinctiveness of Liberty:

I think it is a new step forward especially within the community because we are the first to do it, be a green printer, one of a few in the state I believe. It’s a new step, new idea, different option for customers, and a smart option for customers to choose.

She feels a sense of pride in her organization for taking this stance:

It is a good feeling to know that your workplace is doing something positive for the environment. It is just a good feeling that I can educate the customers as much as possible so we can continue the efforts and get more people involved. It is just a good feeling to know we are pulling our weight.
By recycling and encouraging others to do the same, Sara gains self-esteem with the belief that she is helping the environment.

Because the organizational mission of “Live Green, Print Green” is distinctive in the printing industry, employees of the organization have increased support and loyalty, Betsy, a salesperson said, “It makes me proud to be a part of an organization that is putting forth the effort to be more environmentally conscientious and more environmentally friendly.” She commended Liberty for, “leading by example showing the business community that we care about the environment.”

Michael agreed, feeling as though Liberty is on the right track, “We are going about good things for the community, the world and our environment. We are just trying to do our part.” The participant’s responses indicate a heightened commitment to the cause of environmental sustainability. Not only are their attitudes towards recycling more favorable than the average American, the employees of Liberty exhibit a great pride in the organization and its decision to “Live Green, Print Green.”

Many employees spoke very favorably of the decision to “go green.” While the decision is uncommon in the printing industry, the eco-friendly approach has created a niche for the organization. Tiffani believed Liberty sets itself apart from other organizations:

I think that it is just a step forward in the organization because I think that a lot of companies today realize that it is the next step, they need to be green. A lot of consumers want that, they are looking for that, so I think that it is a step up, a step going forward for the company.
She benefits from her organizational membership by, “being on the forefront of the green
movement. There are a lot of companies that haven’t done it yet. Obviously the
environment is going to last longer. I will be able to breathe when I am older. That will
be nice.”

While Amy’s feelings towards the change in mission are a bit mixed, she has faith
the organization distinguishing itself from other printing companies will translate into
increased sales, “We went to totally recycled. That dictates to your customers, because a
lot of people may not care about the environment, but I think eventually everyone is
going to recycle. We are just getting a jump.” The employees, including Amy, showed
pride in being the first within the industry to take on the challenge, hoping this change
translated into a leading position within the printing industry. By publicizing a
commitment to environmental friendliness, George hoped “people like us a little better
because we are eco-friendly.”

If distinguishing Liberty Group Printing from other organizations within the
industry doesn’t do the trick, Chris’s attitude towards the organization might just be the
boost the organization needs. He concluded his interview by saying, “Send all of your
friends to Liberty for printing. We need all the customers we can get.”

As Abrams and Hogg (1990) as well as Ashforth and Mael (1989) noted, one
aspect of identification is esteem building. Members of Liberty Group Printing exhibit
great esteem for their organization and the commitment to environmental sustainability
through the prideful comments they made throughout the individual interviews. While
members may have numerous benefits because of their employment with Liberty, the
self-esteem they gain suggests that the level of identification at Liberty is very strong.
It is evident in this study there is a great amount of communication between the leader of the organization and the employees of Liberty Group Printing. Each member of the organization is very familiar with the mission of “Live Green, Print Green” as each and every day they modify their behavior in accordance with its goals. In the next section, we will discuss the process of identification which Liberty Group employees underwent in order to align their beliefs, attitudes and behaviors with the organization’s mission of environmental sustainability.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings of the case are discussed and the research question set forth at the beginning of this study is addressed. First, discussion of employees’ identification with Liberty’s mission of environmental sustainability will occur. Then, the process of identification of Liberty Group employees to the organizational mission statement will be analyzed before addressing limitations and directions for future research. Finally, the contributions of this research to the communication field as well as its implications for organizational communication research will be discussed.

The most prominent theme which emerged during the course of participant responses was the prototype within the organization. The Vice-President has been the driving force behind the “going green” movement at Liberty. As a leader within the organization, she has led by example, educating herself on the importance of environmental sustainability and then following through with actions which help to preserve the environment. She paves the way for employees at Liberty to be more eco-friendly in the workplace. Not only has this leadership affected the behavior of the employees while they are at work, but also has created awareness amongst employees on the effects they have on the environment in their personal lives.

The interests of the Vice-President were first sparked by the social demand of becoming more environmentally friendly which led to the establishment of the mission to “Live Green, Print Green.” This mission has become a statement with which the organization evaluates its success upon. Liberty continually strives to meet the expectations set forth by the Forest Stewardship Council and Sustainable Forest
Initiative. Fairhurst (1997) contended the mission statement should be “a standard by which the corporation is supposed to measure itself and emulate, and whose demand for perfection it should strive to fulfill” (p. 243). The organization has chosen a mission which truly reflects the organization’s values. Liberty has communicated this mission to not only its organizational membership but outside constituents, an important step in ensuring the mission can be utilized as a prototype to shape employee attitudes and behaviors. The mission statement of “Live Green, Print Green” is a focused message which notes the vision and the desired future for the organization. The mission also seeks to differentiate the firm from other firms as well as helping to define the organization’s direction. The mission inspires employees to act congruently with the organization’s goals.

As Cheney and Christiansen (2001) note, there is a need for the internal members of the organization to identify with the mission in order to convince external audiences. In the case of Liberty, the employees exhibit a commitment to recycling efforts and discuss their desires to educate their customers on the importance of being environmentally sustainable. As Perkins (2008) noted, exposure is the most important step in the communication of a mission. The mission of “Live Green, Print Green” has become a prototype for the organization, being reinforced through a flow of communication from the Vice-President to the employees.

As an example of a prototypical leader, the Vice-President exhibits the characteristics which are most prominent within the in-group. These characteristics include a commitment to environmental sustainability, a desire to bring awareness to the cause, and the ability to educate out-group members towards the adjustments in behavior
necessary to be more eco-friendly. Her commitment to the cause as well as her position within the organization makes her capable of leading the in-group of environmentally friendly participants. Lee (2001) discussed the level of leader-member exchange in affecting the amount of identification employees experience with the organizational goals. Rachel is responsible for communicating the mission to the employees and socializing the members to the values of Liberty. According to Lee (2001), leaders have limited amounts of personal and organizational resources (including resources such as time, energy, and proximity to employees). In the current case study, the Vice-President has committed her limited resources to ensure her employees not only follow but believe in the mission statement.

Once a prototype emerges, the next step in the identification process is to create awareness with the employees as well as with the customers of the organization. The participants discussed the decision to adopt the mission of “Live Green, Print Green” as being a group discussion and a group decision. The employees have access to the qualifications to become FSC and SFI certified and our encouraged to seek out information concerning environmental sustainability. They credit an awareness of the issue from an organizational perspective as shaping their personal beliefs and behaviors.

Organizational members are not only aware of the issue of environmental sustainability; they also are educated about the processes which are necessary for a sustainable future. While they are forced to take tests within the workplace, they have applied their knowledge to other organizations with which they are members. They have also chosen to educate others about the process of eco-friendly behaviors which create an in-group which focuses on the environment.
The employees exhibit a commitment to raise awareness amongst out-group members. Not only do they suggest their customers use recycled paper, they also spearhead efforts such as the volunteer fire department’s recycling program and the Bowling Green Sustainability Committee, in order to make community members aware of the need for environmentally friendly practices. Awareness of the issue encourages individuals to become educated about the current state of the environment and the actions necessary to ensure a more sustainable future.

Once awareness is created, information seeking occurs. Employees must be familiar with the guiding principles of the FSI and SFC organizations and the steps necessary to achieve certification. Handbooks for the FSI and SFC are distributed to the employees and they are tested on their knowledge of the material. Participants view the transition as a learning process, one in which mistakes are made and then corrected. On site, the organization has a “center” of recycled paper which they utilize to educate their customers about the different levels of post-consumer waste. The education process begins first with the leader and is passed on to the employees, which then speak about the importance of educating the customers.

Participants have also formed attitudes in favor of in-group behaviors and disregarded for those out-group members who choose to be less than eco-friendly. As Ashforth and Mael (1989) noted, “identification may engender internalization of, and adherence to, group values and norms and homogeneity in attitudes and behavior” (p. 26)” The participants in the current study held similar positive views of efforts to become more environmentally sustainable, indicating identification with the organization’s mission has occurred at Liberty Group Printing.
Employees at Liberty draw distinctions between individuals who recycle and those who do not. A clear in-group/out-group mentality is present. Behaviors that are less than eco-friendly are questioned and members can’t fathom why anyone would choose not to recycle when it is “the right thing to do.” Through communication strategies, in-group members try to educate outsiders to the importance of eco-friendly behaviors.

The employees who are more committed to the organization’s mission of environmentally friendliness often carried the belief structures and values into other roles they held. For instance, the employee who is showing her children that recycling is important has allowed her role as an employee to influence her role as a mother. This implies organizations can play a large role in shaping societal value structures as this employee is shaping the values of her children which will have an impact on the future of the environmental movement.

While group members place a great deal of importance in recycling, they realize their efforts are not without cost. The current economical situation plays a role in determining to what extent employees recycle. Members also note how the cost of recycled paper can inhibit customers from choosing Liberty and instead choosing a printing company that is cheaper as well as less eco-friendly. Economical factors elicited mixed responses from the employees at Liberty. Some blamed the economy for hindering the mission at Liberty, while others were optimistic about the opportunities it could present in expanding Liberty’s customer base. In reality, only time will tell how Liberty weathers the current economic situation.
One may be aware there is an issue and educated about the consequences of their behaviors, however if they do not feel the benefits outweigh the costs, they will not modify their behaviors. In the current case, the economy played a large factor in a member’s choice to become more environmentally friendly both within the organization and in their personal lives. The price to recycle was the primary “cost” in the minds of many participants noting it was very costly to be more environmentally friendly. As this is a company which depends on the most cost effective bids in order to gain business, the added cost of recycled goods was often a deterrent to a successful business practice.

Depending if the benefits outweigh the costs, Liberty employees engage in varied personal behaviors. Some have chosen to extend the importance of recycling to their families and other organizations, while others have intentions that have been unfulfilled. Personal behaviors might be a direct indicator of the level of identification that the employee experiences and is worthy of further inquiry.

To combat this concern over price, many participants discussed the benefit of pride for “doing the right thing.” The Vice-President firmly believes using recycled paper and soy inks is the “right thing to do” and is going to utilize these products despite the consequences. Members also note the prestige of the organization as being a benefit that would outweigh the cost of decreased business. Another benefit is acting in accordance with organizational expectations, thus securing their employment with the organization and positive standing with the leadership. Presently, the benefits of printing green over the costs are winning out at Liberty Group. Depending on future economic situations, there may be a shift in the belief structure within the organization.
Pride in the organization is prevalent amongst Liberty employees. They have a sense that their organization is distinct and that the mission is innovative within the printing industry. Liberty’s distinctiveness allows members to conduct a comparison of their belief structures to those of out-group members which leads to self enhancement. The participants questioned why other organizations had not devoted energy to the cause of environmental sustainability. Most employees of Liberty believe themselves to be superior to others who choose not to recycle, while still noting room for improvement. In individual interviews they question why outsiders do not act the same way they do. This allows for continued upward mobility as the organizational members perfect the practices of Liberty.

As an environmentally friendly mission statement within the printing industry is unique to Liberty Group, it is important to note how the employees of Liberty identify with the mission of “Live Green, Print Green.” Past research has outlined indicators of organizational identification including the formation of in-groups and out-groups, adaptation of personal values and belief structures to align with those of the organization, loyalty to the group, and emerging prototypes. The employees at Liberty exhibit these characteristics of organizational identification centered on the environmentally friendly mission of the organization.

From this study, there is no doubt the company has communicated the beliefs about what is most core to the organization, distinguishing what it means to be a part of Liberty Group Printing. This foundation of environmental sustainability allowed the participants in this study to have a clearly defined in-group which focuses on eco-friendly processes. This in-group allows members to establish group norms and rules.
Employees build identification with the mission statement through organizational socialization. The socialization process was described by one of the newest employees of Liberty Group in which she received a crash course in recycled papers prior to employment. The notion of being environmentally sustainable is engrained in the training process for new hires, in the everyday communication structures of Liberty Group, and in the employee evaluation process to ensure every employee is conscious of their effect on the environment. Employees of Liberty are even given tests to ensure their behaviors are in line with the organization’s mission. As Barge and Schlueter (2004) described, Liberty Group is “molding the new recruit into the ideal employee” (p. 252).

Much discussion centered on the desire to be FSC and SFI certified. The Forest Stewardship Council has ten guiding principles which Liberty Group has adopted in the organization’s daily practices. These principles include “equitable use and sharing of benefits derived from the forest, appropriate and continuously updated management plan, as well as contributing and reducing the pressures on and promoting the restoration and conservation of natural resources (www.fsc.org).” The organization prohibits the conversion of forests and the use of hazardous chemical as well as demands all international laws concerning sustainability be followed. These guidelines affect Liberty Group Printing in that they have committed to using recycled paper in order to preserve the forests which supply their paper, as well as continuously monitoring a management plan within the organization. As the company uses soy inks to produce its products, a continuous awareness of the ink sources is necessary to ensure no hazardous chemicals are being used. A Sustainable Forest Initiative certification is a sign a company is
“buying wood and paper products from well-managed forests, backed by a rigorous, third-party certification audit (www.sfiprogram.org).”

These guidelines dictate the behaviors of the organizational members and demand constant communication between the two accrediting organizations and Liberty Group Printing. This desire to practice in accordance with the environmental policies of the FSC and SFI has clearly encouraged leader-member exchanges. In turn, members of the organization are cognitive of their actions and the affect of these actions on meeting the criteria of the FSC and SFI, which shows the employees identify with the goals of the organization. This cognitive basis of group behavior leads an individual to self-categorize based upon their actions.

When discussing the desire to be FSC and SFI certified, members of the organization noted the prestige associated with these accreditations. Since there are no other printers in the area certified with these organizations, the company gains recognition for excellence which in turn builds the self-esteem of the employees who are a part of the organization. An individual can enjoy the status of the group by obtaining membership. In this case, the employees feel as though their efforts are being recognized, distinguishing them from others who are less environmentally friendly. In the arena of eco-friendliness, Liberty Group Printing is a winner and thus its employees are winners, increasing their support and loyalty to the mission of “Live Green, Print Green.”

It is also important to note employee tenure seems to play a role in the level of identification with the environmentally friendly mission. Those participants who had been with the company through many changes in the mission focused primarily on
responsibilities of their job as being the reason to participate in environmentally friendly practices. The employees who had less tenure and had either joined the organization as the change was being implemented or came on board after the mission was established, exhibited more commitment to the cause and a desire to spread the message of sustainability to out-group individuals. The only employee who said he not participate in recycling efforts outside of work has been with the organization less than six months. As he becomes more engrained with the organization and is socialized to its belief structures, it would be expected that he too would adapt to a more environmentally friendly lifestyle.

The participants in the current study identify with the mission of “Live Green, Print Green” and have thus modified their behaviors and attitudes to be more eco-friendly. As was mentioned in the findings section, every participant in the current study participates in the recycling effort within the organization and all but one practice or has intentions to practice environmentally friendly behaviors in their own homes. This indicates the participant’s beliefs mirror those of the organization’s that environmental sustainability is imperative for a better future.

This case study points to a process employees engage in to achieve identification with an organization’s mission statement, especially one of environmental sustainability. In the current study, employees generally followed a process which first began with a catalyst or a driving force to the movement. This prototype, the Vice-President enacting the mission, brought about awareness and a need to be educated about the issue amongst employees. An in-group formed in which those who are more environmentally conscientious feel as though those less committed to the cause are being reckless in their actions. Personal behavior was modified when the benefits outweighed the cost in the
minds of the employees. Attitude formation was determinant upon the employees either favorable opinion of the organization’s values or an unfavorable one. If the employee’s attitude was favorable, they often displayed pride in the organization and in turn felt a greater level of self-esteem for being a part of the organization.

While this study addresses the communication habits of a particular organization, the findings have implications for other organizations. While past studies have indicated that organizational mission statements have little effect on employee behavior, the current case seems to be a steady example of how a mission statement can be enacted and communicated effectively in order to mold employee belief structures. As a prototype for the mission, the Vice-President has chosen to spend valuable resources such as her time and money to communicate the importance of environmental sustainability to her employees thus creating identification with the mission. If other organizational leaders exhibited the same dedication and passion towards organizational mission statements, employees may be more likely to identify with that mission and adopt the organization’s values.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study fills a void in organizational communication research by addressing the role of the organization in shaping societal values; however the research does have its limitations. This study serves as a graduate thesis and is therefore restricted by both time and finances. The study was conducted a year after the change in organizational mission and the participants may have been so engrained in the current mission, they may not have considered past directions of the organization in their responses.
One limitation to the current study is the aspect of social desirability. As the interviews were conducted on site, the employees may have felt the need to monitor their responses more closely. As discussed, organizational leadership has the ability to modify behavior in the workplace and employees may have felt uncomfortable sharing honest answers with the researcher. However, many of the participants discussed not only a belief in the mission statement, but also concerns they had with the mission’s successes. This dual view of the organization’s mission statement hints that the employees felt comfortable in sharing their honest thoughts with the researcher. Also, outside of the interview situation, the researcher observed honest communication about the lack of recycling efforts on the part of one of the newest employees. This informal communication indicates that an open line of communication exists between the leadership and the employees of the organization and thus breaks down the barriers that social desirability may have influenced.

The organization is a local organization familiar to the researcher and thus may be biased by the researcher’s previous knowledge of the organization. As the company is very small, employing only fourteen employees, the data may not reflect the identification process in a larger organization. Future studies may address this limitation, seeking out larger organizations with environmentally friendly mission statements to see if the amount of leader-member exchanges effect the level of identification amongst employees. As more organizations take on the task of preserving the environment, the level of prestige the organization experiences because of its uniqueness in the industry may decline, thus decreasing the level of identification of employees. A longitudinal study may be necessary in order to address this issue.
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the organizational mission statement, “Live Green, Print Green,” of Liberty Group acts as a prototype with which the employees can mold their attitudes and behaviors in alignment with organizational goals. Organizational members identify with a mission through a process which begins with a prototypical leader creating awareness of the issue and then educating the employees about the cost and benefits of modifying their behavior. The current economical status had a great impact on employee’s decisions to recycle or not to recycle. Identification occurs when the organizational members modify their behavior to satisfy the goals of the organization and exhibit positive attitude towards the group. By identifying themselves with a distinctive organization, Liberty employees gain recognition and prestige through their membership with the company. In turn, the organizational members exhibit loyalty and support for the direction the organization has taken.

Often, organizational mission statements are simply a tagline without much meaning. However, as the current case indicates the mission statement can be utilized as a prototype that motivates employees to action by fostering identification with clearly defined targets and goals. Organizations can have a major effect on societal values and should consider this role in shaping employee belief structures through the various organizational communication strategies, including the mission statements.
REFERENCES


Appendix A :

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: Green Employees: Organizational Identification in an Environmentally Friendly Company
Investigator: Jenna Haugen

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him/her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project:
The focus of this research will be on the trend of environmentally friendly organizational mission statements and the impact that these mission statements have on employee identification. Through a case study of employees at Liberty Group, this research will explore the relationship between a mission statement of sustainability and behaviors of environmental sustainability amongst employees. The research question is: How, if at all, do environmentally friendly organization mission statements assist in identification amongst employees regarding environmental issues?

2. Explanation of Procedures:
Individual interviews will be conducted with each of the organizational members. The interview will last approximately one hour depending on the length of your answers. An interview guide will be utilized to allow for a semi-structured interview. Follow-up questions may be asked based upon your responses. The interview will be recorded with your consent for accuracy and transcription.

3. Discomfort and Risks:
This study places participants at little to no risk. Disclosure of information will be kept confidential and therefore no side effects, physical or psychological harm will be incurred.

4. **Benefits:**
There are currently no case studies which examine organizational identification in environmentally friendly organizations. By participating in this study, you will gain insight into your recycling behaviors and motives behind those behaviors. By discussing your connections to your groups, you may be able to strengthen those relationships. Knowledge of communication patterns which strengthen identification will add to the literature of organizational rhetoric.

5. **Confidentiality:**
The researcher will contact subjects to provide a description of the study procedures and ask for their participation. If subjects choose to participate, the researcher will schedule a one-hour interview to be conducted at the participants’ convenience during a time that is also convenient for participant. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to sign the informed consent form and given pseudonyms to protect individual identity. All data collected will be stored in a secured area within the faculty sponsor’s office for a period of three years.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:**
Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University or the researcher. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

__________________________________________ _______________
Signature of Participant      Date

__________________________________________ _______________
Witness        Date

You acknowledge that the use of audio equipment will be used during the interviews and you grant authorization for the researchers to audio tape your voice during the interview(s).
THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD

If you have questions or concerns for the researcher, please contact: Jenna Haugen, Primary Researcher
Cell: (270) 704-0903 Office (270) 745-3067 E-mail: jenna.haugen@wku.edu

If you have questions regarding the procedures of this study, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs:
Director -- Dr. Phillip E. Myers, Human Protections Administrator, (270) 745-4652
E-mail: phillip.myers@wku.edu
Compliance Manager -- Mr. Sean Rubino, Human Protections Administrator, (270) 745-2129
E-mail: sean.rubino@wku.edu
Appendix B
Interview Guide

1.) What familiarity do you have with the organization’s motto of Live Green, Print Green?
   a. The change in vision occurred about a year ago. What were your thoughts about this change?
   b. In your opinion, what does this mean for your organization?
   c. What does this statement mean to you outside of the organization?

2.) Who would you say is the driving force behind the “going green” movement within your organization?

3.) Let’s talk about your recycling habits
   a. Could you describe your recycling habits prior to your employment with Liberty?
   b. How, if at all, did you become more aware of environmentally friendly processes once you were employed with Liberty?
   c. What habits, if any, have you started as a result of working for an environmentally friendly organization?
   d. In what ways, if any, has your opinion of individuals who choose not to recycle changed?

4.) How do you benefit from being a member of the organization?
   a. How do you think our environment benefits from recycling?
   b. What benefits do you think are gained from recycling?

5.) What challenges do you face in attempting to live green?

6.) How do you feel your attitudes towards recycling would be different if you weren’t an employee of Liberty Group?

7.) Is there anything else you would like to comment on that I haven’t addressed in the interview about Living Green, Printing Green?
Appendix C
Organizational Approval

I, the undersigned, give permission for Jenna Haugen to utilize the name, Liberty Group Printing, in discussing the findings of her thesis entitled GREEN EMPLOYEES: Organizational Identification in an Environmentally Friendly Company. I understand that employees who agreed to be interviewed for this study will be given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Joy Downing _________________________ 8/18/09
Joy Downing, Date
Vice-President