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**The transformation of the newsroom:  
The collaborative dynamics of journalists' work**

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**The transformation of the newsroom:  
The collaborative dynamics of journalists' work**

by

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**Dissertation**

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents who have always told me to reach for my dreams with perseverance, hard work, and passion.

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**The transformation of the newsroom:  
The collaborative dynamics of journalists' work**

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This study examines online news production through a cross-national comparative ethnography of two newsrooms: *The Chicago Tribune* in Chicago, Illinois and *El Norte* in Monterrey, Mexico. The researcher looks specifically at the extent of collaborative group work in the online newsroom. First, the researcher investigates the degree to which online newsrooms operate organizationally as collaborative groups when producing content for the website, as opposed to functioning individualistically when producing content for the website. The second facet examined is the cultural variability (Hofstede, 1980) of collaboration in the two online newsrooms, particularly whether the United States and Mexican online newsrooms support a collectivistic or individualistic and a high-context or low-context culture schema (Hofstede, 1980; Hall 1976). The last facet explored is how the collaborative behavior of the journalists in the two newsrooms supports or interferes with the practice of journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness and if this helps to make journalism better. This study found the *El*

*Norte* newsroom has a collectivistic and high-context communication culture whereas *The Chicago Tribune* newsroom has an individualistic and low-context communication culture. Both newsrooms support the principles of verification and context in the news that is produced for the Website that helps to make the news accurate and comprehensive. It can be inferred, however, that the collectivistic, high-context communication culture is more supportive of a collaborative work environment that is conducive to making the journalists work together to help make the news accurate and comprehensive for the public. When the news is accurate and comprehensive, the public has better-informed citizens to make decisions in their daily lives as part of a democratic society. This study also has implications for the journalism and business industry as to the benefits of collaborative groupwork on the service or product outcome in an organization.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

They say that if you want a quality job to get done, you have to do it yourself. However, is this really true? If you work together with others does it make difficult to get the quality work done or does it make it better? It may be surprising to know that actually working together with others does lead to a better outcome.

In today's complex and digital workplace, multi-tasking and working with multiple people and resources have become the norm. The formal lines of authority have been diminished and the decision-making process has become more participative and horizontal. The access to tools and systems in the workplace has become shared and open to anyone in the organization, so much so that wikis and open source applications are common. This kind of workplace has transformed the way organizations perform a service or make a product. These traits of today's workplace are perfect for nurturing collaborative work practices.

How? Collaboration means sharing work tasks, accessing tools and resources at the same time, working in the same physical and virtual space areas, and making decisions as a group. The conditions for collaboration in the workplace must include groups that are free to form on their own, when communication is open, and everyone is highly dependent on each other.

We can take these traits and conditions of a collaborative work environment and consider how they can be examined in one digital workplace – the online newsroom of a newspaper organization. Why?

It's a perfect case study to see how an existing culture of people who have always been known to work autonomously (and within a hierarchical management structure) can actually work together and collaborate for the greater good of the outcome – the news.

Instead of just one editor or reporter constantly checking stories for facts and accuracy before posting them to the Web, what happens when several journalists also review stories to see if other information and resources could be added to make the stories more complete and comprehensive? In a time when journalists are being criticized for their lack of being able to report the news accurately, fairly and with context, there is hope for the press. Journalism has the opportunity to regain its reputation if more news organizations allow their journalists to work collaboratively on the news versus individually.

It can be inferred that this collaborative process makes the work more thorough and makes the news better because the news is accurate (as well as comprehensive) for the public. When journalists collaborate, they help in telling the most accurate, truthful, and fair story. In turn, this information helps the public to make informed decisions in their daily lives in a democratic society. When there is an informed public, a democratic society can survive and thrive.

In general, when employees are in an organization that nurtures informal groups, shared tasks, horizontal lines of decision-making authority, communication, and open resources and tools, collaboration can happen. If quality in products and services is to remain important in the business world, collaboration is necessary.

If you want a quality job to get done, doing it together may be the new mantra in the workplace in the not-so-distant future.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine two online newsrooms as two case studies to test this notion of collaborative groupwork and if it affects journalism practices for the better, particularly making the news accurate and comprehensive for the public.

The new journalist is no longer deciding what the public should know. She is helping audiences make order out of it. This does not mean simply adding interpretation or analysis to news reporting. The first task of the new journalist/sense maker, rather, is to verify what information is reliable and then order it so people can grasp it efficiently (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2001, p.24).

Over the past decade, newsrooms, particularly online operations, experienced stringent growing pains, including cuts in staffing and in resources, and a lack of respect given to the online news staff by their peers in the print newsroom. Despite these changes in the newsroom, there are challenges, but also opportunities. In general, the field goes through cycles every so often, including staffing, production, and the way journalistic principles are being upheld in the online newsroom. This cycle can be considered a transformation. The focus of this study is the transformation of journalists' work in the online newsroom.

### **1.1 TRANSFORMATIONS: SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL**

Transformations can be categorized as social, economic and technological. The social transformation concerns the manner in which journalists are organized and how they do their work in the online newsroom. For example, newsrooms now are restructuring their operations by integrating staffs to produce both the website and print newspaper such as *The New York Times*: in 2006 they moved both staffs into the same building and space with a unified editorial structure. Another example occurred in 2007

when the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* downsized its operations by 10 percent as a result of restructuring: changes included scaled back delivery of papers in outlying counties, eliminated or consolidated beats, and converging the traditional news desks into four (news and information, enterprise, digital, and print) (Stepp, 2007, p.16). These changes happened in the United States and around the globe. In September 2007, BBC News merged its website, TV news programs, and radio news bulletins to remain competitive and meet “cost cutting targets” (Holmwood, 2007).

News organizations also reduced their news products for cost reduction and efficiencies. For example, in January 2007, *The Wall Street Journal* launched a redesign for its print and online products. The print newspaper was narrower with more color and the reduction of breaking news (reserved for the online edition) (Holahan, 2007). In December 2007 The Tribune Co. finalized its purchase by real-estate investor, Samuel Zell to become a private media company and the next month, *The Chicago Tribune* (one of its properties) reduced the physical size of the paper. An email announcement to Tribune subscribers stated, “we’ll transition to a trimmer page size that will be ½ inch narrower, saving newsprint and making it easier to read and hold the paper” (Personal Communication, 2008).

A technological transformation also is happening. The incorporation of multiple media and equipment requires online journalists now to think differently about how they cover and report the news. For example, equipment such as video cameras and multimedia applications such as Soundslides and FinalCut Pro are becoming an industry standard for online journalists around the globe. Online journalists in 2005 stated that knowledge of software applications such as Dreamweaver, multimedia authoring

programs and Flash were rated as highly important skills in their newsrooms (Magee, 2006, p.6). In a recent article in *American Journalism Review* on the explosion of video online, *Washington Post* officials said they taught 12 reporters a month how to shoot video, *Tampa Tribune* officials said that of the 275 members of their staff, 60 had an in-house video training program, and the *Miami Herald* stated it publishes 15 to 18 stand-alone video pieces weekly on its website (Layton, 2007/2008, pp.26-27). So, the technological transformation affects newsrooms and journalists' work.

### **1.1.2 Social Transformation**

Of these transformations, the social transformation of journalists holds the focus of this dissertation. Economic and technological transformations are important, but understanding journalists and their daily work can help us to understand just how much journalism is changing overall and how it connects to issues of organizational and structural change. Since 1998, several scholars have looked at the organizational and structural newsroom changes from the viewpoint of convergence of people, resources and work. Convergence in newsrooms has been defined (Wirth, 2005) as the merging of two or more media into a news organization, such as an online and print staff coming together with a television station staff and producing the news. Regardless, several studies have been conducted on the role of convergence in the newsroom and its implementation because of technological innovation, deregulation and globalization, changing consumer tastes, technological standardization, the search for synergy, fear of being left behind, and repurposing of old media content for distribution via new media (Wirth, 2005, p. 445) but

those studies address only the top layer of the social transformation, neglecting an inner layer including the *collaboration* of the people, resources and the work. This social transformation is an important element of the newsroom culture. Previous scholarship demonstrated a narrow view of newsroom culture, meaning collaboration may be analyzed by looking at whether newsroom cultures organizationally operate as a collective or as individuals.

## **1.2 THE CULTURE**

Previous studies of newsroom culture can be grouped into two sets. One set is individualistic culture and focuses on the autonomy and professionalism of the journalist; another is group-centered and focuses on the autonomy, performance and quality of the news product. The first set (Breed, 1955; Matejko, 1967; Agyris 1974; Gans 1979; Fishman 1980; Soloski, 1989; Redmond 2005; Singer, 2006) connects to an individualistic culture in which journalists work for their own career pursuits and to keep the status quo within the news organization.

Other scholars have investigated the journalist as part of a group or team (Stepp 1995; Sylvie, 1996; Lewis 1997; Hansen, Neuzil & Ward 1998; Neuzil, Hansen & Ward, 1999; Endres, Schierhorn & Schierhorn, 1999; Thornton 2006). Teams and team reporting concepts in the print newsroom began to be introduced in the 1980s through a few influential individuals such as McMasters, Buck Ryan and Mario Garcia. A newsroom team could consist of two to several journalists involved on a particular story or beat over a period of time (Stepp 1995; Endres, Schierhorn & Schierhorn, 1999; Thornton 2006). The industry at the time was seeking new ways to save costs and

produce more and saw that the team reporting concept could possibly be the answer without additional resources needed. However, this concept died by the 1990s with few newsrooms still using the practice today.

This team focus gets close to understanding if a newsroom operates collectively, but neglects how collaboration may be included because of the lack of attention to what happens within the team. So, if we can look at a larger unit, such as a group culture in the newsroom, we may be able to identify collaboration. One way to do so involves measuring levels of collectivism and individualism (Hofstede, 1980). A collectivistic culture supports the notion that “people belong to ingroups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty” whereas an individualistic culture supports the notion that “people are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family only” (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, p.419). Therefore, people in a collectivistic culture depend on each other, whereas people in an individualistic culture are independent. Thus, we can posit that a collectivistic culture may be likely to support newsroom collaboration more so than in an individualistic culture, long considered the status quo in journalism.

As mentioned earlier, the social transformation of how journalists work is important to describing the culture of the newsroom. This social transformation is global and there are differences in newsrooms that may offer insight as to how collaboration may occur in other news organizations around the world. Thus, this study seeks to identify the cultural variability of collaboration in the news production process in an online newsroom in the US and Mexico.

Within a culture, there are facets that contribute to that culture, one being the form of communication used among the people in that culture.

### **1.3 THE COMMUNICATION**

If collaboration can exist in the newsroom, how should we consider the flow of communication and newswork? This may be analyzed by looking at whether the form of communication that makes newsroom work flow efficiently is implicit or is explicit. Explicit communication is straightforward communication that everyone understands, whereas implicit communication is filled with meaning that a select few understand. This form of implicit communication can be considered low-context communication (Hall, 1976) that is indirect and filled with meaning; explicit communication can be considered high-context communication (Hall, 1976) that is straightforward without any hidden meanings. Thus, if we can identify how much high-and low-context communication (Hall, 1976) occurs in a newsroom culture, we may be able to see how they support collaboration and newswork flow.

### **1.4 THE CONTENT**

Another facet of a culture is what the individuals do and what artifacts they work with on a daily basis that helps to represent their culture. One of those artifacts can be considered the content with which the journalists work with in the newsroom.

Accuracy and context are two important tenets of journalism in making sure stories are correct, verified and comprehensive in providing the information needed for the news citizens to make informed decisions for their daily lives.

In 2001, Kovach and Rosentiel published *The Elements of Journalism*, challenging news citizens and journalists to look at the practice of journalism and to recognize that a transformation (online as well as offline) is needed for journalism to survive. They discuss nine elements of journalism. Of the nine principles, the purpose of journalism as “a discipline of verification” that “must keep the news comprehensive and proportional” (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2001, pp.12-13) is the focus of this dissertation through the ways in which accuracy and context are practiced. The other elements are not as easily observable or quantifiable in the online newsroom and can have different meanings for journalists in different news organizations.

However, verification and comprehensiveness are observable in the newsroom across different news organizations. For example, an observed act of verification can include an editor in an online newsroom re-checking a source or a fact before the story posts to the website. A producer may add a few related stories to a story online she posted minutes ago because she wants the reader to have more context. This can be an example of comprehensiveness. Such observations can bring us closer to understanding these principles’ use and practice in the online newsroom.

In addition, the ethical and journalistic principles in online journalism have not been fully explored (Christians, 1998; Deuze & Yeshua, 2001; Singer, 2003; Singer 2006). Online journalists face similar-but-different dilemmas that include new levels of verification and accuracy because of the immediacy of posting information on the site. So verification and comprehensiveness may be more readily practiced and observed in online journalism news production.

In sum, considering collaboration in the newsroom can lead to intellectual diversity among the journalists when they are able to verify information and provide additional information and context to the stories they publish online. Thus, the content that the journalists work with helps to understand another part of the transformation in newsrooms around the world.

### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The researcher has conducted a cross-national comparative ethnography of two newsrooms (*The Chicago Tribune* in Chicago, Illinois and *El Norte* in Monterrey, Mexico) to document the evolution of online journalism.

Field studies were conducted to have a better understanding of how they operate by seeing behavior first-hand. At the time of this dissertation, *The Chicago Tribune*'s online newsroom was not integrated with the print newsroom and *El Norte*'s online newsroom was completely integrated with the print newsroom. In reference to these newsrooms, integration refers to the joining of staffs from the print and online operations.

The researcher wanted to discover if there were differences in how a collaborative news production system works and how well these systems support certain journalistic principles. The researcher conducted both formal and informal interviews with the staff in addition to being a participant-observer. The major research questions that will be examined include:

1. What are the characteristics of an online news workgroup in the online newsroom?
2. What form of collaboration is employed in the online newsroom?
3. What are the collaborative traits of the online news production process?
4. To what degree is the online newsroom a collectivistic or individualistic culture?  
A low-or high-context communication culture?

All of these questions above tie into one overall research question:

5. Do the news routines of the online news workgroups support or interfere with the journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness?

## **1.6 OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION**

The purpose of this study is to document two online news production systems to show if collaborative group work supports the principles of verification and comprehensiveness in these newsrooms. They serve as case studies of the degree to which culture and communication of these online newsrooms and journalists contribute to the transformation of journalism today. This dissertation is divided into three sections.

The first section covers the relevant literature from business management, media sociology and group communication that helps to explore collaborative news production among groups of journalists in the online newsroom. The theoretical framework of organizational “culture” theory is described and how the schema of Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1980) of high and low context communication as well as collectivism and

individualism help describe the culture of the newsroom. Conceptualizations and research questions are presented and case study and ethnographic methods (such as observations and interviews) are discussed.

The second section addresses the results. One chapter covers the observations and interviews conducted at each newsroom. A chapter follows to compare and to contrast the two newsrooms.

The third section discusses conclusions and implications for collaboration in online newsrooms.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

This chapter will help to frame via existing literature and theory how the two online newsrooms under study in this dissertation are going to be explained by the structure and system of the newsroom as an organization. Second, this chapter will help to frame how the journalists can be understood by their behavior. It will explain particularly, the journalists' behavior as a group and if they work and communicate together or individually to collaborate on the news that they produce for the Website. Also, this chapter will help to connect how the collaborative behavior of the journalist groups' can help to explain how this makes journalism better by their collective contribution to make the news accurate and comprehensive for the public. This is illustrated more generally in Model A (see Figure 2.1) that shows how an organizational culture (individualistic and/or collectivistic) with a specific form of communication in the organization (low-context and/or high-context) and work behavior (individual or workgroup) impacts how work is produced and the quality of its outcome (product and/or service). Therefore, the production of work is affected by what form of collaboration is employed and nurtured within the organizational culture.

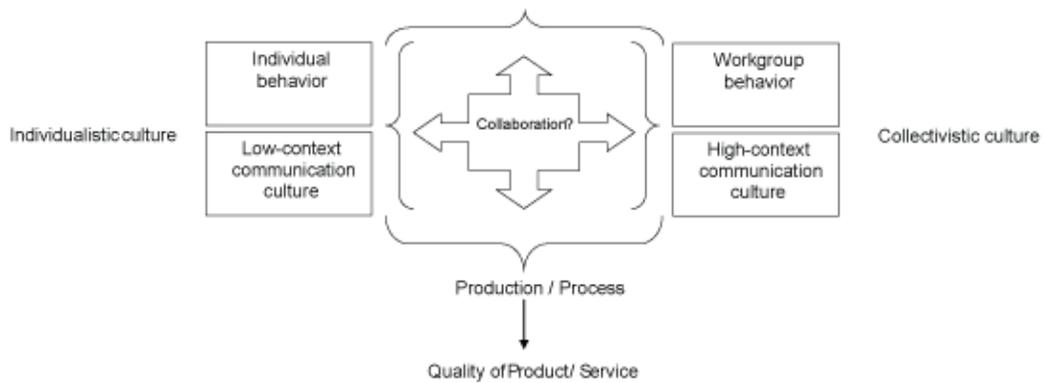


Figure 2.1: Model A: Organizational Culture Defined

This chapter explains why organizational theory, particularly the organizational culture theory, serves as the theoretical framework of this study. Second, the chapter discusses empirical evidence about the theory. Third, the chapter shows how the organizational behavior of groups and teams can be applied to the organizational culture along with the collaboration of work. Fourth, the chapter links the findings from this literature to justify the study of newsroom organization and its culture. Fifth, the chapter will connect the theoretical linkages made to the research questions used in this study.

## 2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Organizational culture theory is chosen as the theoretical framework for this study. This study traces Hofstede's (1980) path of organizational culture and its intellectual history in order to arrive at his historical constructs versus using organizational communication theory. Besides organizational culture theory, other

developed organizational theories include “classical,” “modern,” and the systems and contingencies theories. These theories have been shown to contrast the most when compared to the cultural perspective (Shafritz & Ott, 1987). The following sections review each theory and explain why organizational culture theory is most appropriate.

### **2.1.2 Organizational “Classical” Theory**

Organizational theory developed in the 1800s through the 1940s through the contributions of several individuals including, but not limited to: Münsterberg (H. Münsterberg, 1913; M. Münsterberg, 1922) and his application of psychological findings of individuals from the laboratory into the real world – in the organization; Taylor (1911) and his focus on scientific management of the fast and most effective ways to produce and perform in the organization; and Weber (1922) with his focus on the role of bureaucracy in the structures of the organization and patterns of behavior in making an organization run. The theory has four basic tenets:

1. Organizations exist to accomplish production-related and economic goals.
2. There is one best way to organize for production, and that way can be found through systematic, scientific inquiry.
3. Production is maximized through specialization and division of labor.
4. People and organizations act in accordance with rational economic principles. (Shafritz & Ott, 1987, p.21)

This theory helps to explain the organization as a finite object easily analyzed based on its production and output. This theory stemmed from industrialization and the factory model of working. It helped to explain how to coordinate and to organize multiple aspects of the organization.

But it focuses very narrowly on the organization as a static, linear and closed system that operates in one fashion. For example, it focuses on explaining or describing the different functions of labor (i.e. assembly or packaging) from its stages of development to its outcome, ready for the consumer. It excludes individuals in the organization and their contribution as well as their overall work environment. Individuals were considered a part of the production line and seen as nothing more or nothing less. This perspective would be challenged by the mid-1950s.

### **2.1.3 Organizational “Modern” Theory**

This theory posits that the structure of the organization is the crucial element in how an organization accomplishes its goals: through control and cooperation of its employees, and through the division of labor among its employees (Bolman & Deal, 1984; Shafritz & Ott, 1987). The main premise of this theory was used after World War II in the 1960s and 1970s to help explain how rules and authority determine how organizations function and operate. This theory helped to advance pre-World War II “classical” theory; scholars (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Etzioni, 1961; Blau & Scott, 1961; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1969) helped to advance the identification of division of labor and segmentation of work and tasks in the organization as well as the influence of technology. Others (Davis & Lawrence, 1977) proposed new structures, including a matrix format that combined functions, tasks and behaviors into one model, whereas Mintzberg (1979) developed a management policy model that incorporated the nature of

the work, the decision-making process and the analysis of its implementation in the organization.

However, this theory does not account for the larger macro factors, such as the human relations and social aspect to the operations of an organization. For example, this theory would help to identify areas of production inefficiencies and how decisions by management may have prevented the production of the service or product meeting its optimal goal because of structural flaws. These flaws then could be corrected through the use of changing the division of labor or how the service or product was being produced. As “classical” theory did, “modern” theory advances the ways to identify how an organization is structured and how it operates. But it neglects to identify organizations as unique. An organization is unique because of the distinctive culture embedded in it. Thus, the modern theory neglects this uniqueness because it sees organizations as having the same attributes and characteristics capable of replication in another organization in the same fashion, and provides a “one size fits all” approach to explaining the structures of organizations, which would later prove imprecise.

#### **2.1.4 Organizational “Systems” Theory**

The development of “systems” theory that sought to expand on structure of the organization assisted “modern” theory. The systems theory sought to explain “an organization as a complex set of dynamically intertwined and interconnected elements, including its inputs, processes, outputs, feedback loops, and the environment in which it operates” (Shafritz & Ott, 1987, p.234). For example, systems theory can identify and

categorize how various departments in the organization communicate with each other during the development of an initiative in the organization. Thus, systems theory looked at the organization from a more open, dynamic, and adaptive perspective. As a result, scholars (Thompson, 1967; Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972; Katz & Kahn, 1996) successfully identify the organization as one that must adapt to the environment as it changes.

But systems theory does not help to explain the culture beyond these processes and systems that happen among individuals in the organization itself. For example, it neglects to explain individual factors of those working in the organization and the values and beliefs they bring with them to the workplace and how these contribute to their work environment. It also neglects a part of the organization's embedded history of patterns of loyalty established over the years among workers and how this contributes to the culture.

### **2.1.5 Organizational Culture Theory**

In comparison to the “classical,” “modern,” and “systems,” theories, organizational culture theory takes into account greater macro factors that influence the organization's operations; “...the personal preferences of organizational members are not restrained by systems of formal rules, authority, and by norms of rational behavior. Instead, they are controlled by cultural norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions” (Shafritz & Ott, 1987, p. 374). The underlying assumptions of how work is done in an organization are understood by the individuals, in that work is automatic and pervasive without there being explicit instructions and that work is just part of the culture. Thus, the theory focuses on less-tangible items (beliefs, assumptions, norms, artifacts and behaviors) that

differ from previous theories (Shafritz & Ott, 1987) which do not include these items. In comparison, previous theories focus on the explicit, such as functions, processes, systems, and structures of the organization, omitting some of the implicit items, such as norms and behaviors. In comparison to the existing tenets of classical theory, organizational cultural theory has the following consensus among scholars:

1. Organizational cultures exist.
2. Each organizational culture is relatively unique.
3. Organizational culture is a socially constructed concept.
4. Organizational culture provides organizational members with a way of understanding and making sense of events and symbols.
5. Organizational culture is a powerful lever for guiding organizational behavior. It functions as “organizational control mechanisms, informally approving or prohibiting some patterns of behavior” (Martin & Siehl, 1983). (See Shafritz & Ott, 1987, p. 378).

Over the years, this theory has been under scrutiny in how it describes the essence of an organization (Bolman & Deal, 1997). It counters the modern and systems schools’ notion that structure and system influence how individuals act; cultural theory believes the existing assumptions and beliefs embedded in the organization have a role.

Also, this theory utilized different methodological approaches than the previous theories, which used experiments and surveys; it focused more on observation and on ethnography because these approaches allowed scholars to go into an organization and observe day-to-day operations.

This theory still is fairly young in comparison to the others and has yet to be fully defined. It includes the structure, interactions and their process among individuals in the organization as well as the dynamics that occur in the workplace as the environment changes and adapts. Also, it captures those items that are tangible as well as intangible in the workplace.

Overall, this theory is the most appropriate and applicable for this study on the newsroom culture and the collaboration among workgroups of online journalists. It is a theory that is able to help explain various facets of the organization from its structure and how it operates to the people working in the organization. The previous theories (classical, modern, systems) would have been able to describe the process and division of labor in the newsroom and news produced, how the goals of the news organization are met through various forms of control and cooperation among the journalists, and how communication processes occur between journalists. Yet, there is something missing – the culture. The organization cultural theory identifies how collaboration works in the newsroom by the norms, the values, the beliefs, and the assumptions embedded within the organization, in addition to where it fits within the structure and system of newswork. The next section will describe the empirical evidence of organization “cultural” theory that helps to support its use in this study.

## **2.2 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF THEORY**

Over the last century, several scholars have approached understanding the culture of the organization, albeit indirectly. There have been scholars in the business management field that explored the role of culture in the organization, such as Schein (1985); Sathe (1985); Sergiovanni and Corbally (1984); and Kilmann, Saxton, Serpa and Associates’ (1985).

One of the most popular approaches to defining culture in the organization is by Schein (2004). Culture in organizations as defined by Schein (2004) are “a pattern of

shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p.17). Within this context, Schein considers the problems with which all groups in organizations have to address are survival, growth and adaptation as well as internal integration for daily functioning and the ability to adapt and learn (Schein, 2004, p.18).

While Schein and others have been influential, others also investigated the culture of the workplace from the perspective of organizational and national cultures by country. Major findings from this work, such as Hofstede (1980) and the use of communication in cultures by Hall (1976), confirm (1) organizational culture does exist; (2) cultures are more predominantly independent or dependent on each other in completing work; and (3) communication in these cultures is predominantly more explicit or implicit, depending on how independent they are in completing their work.

Hofstede (1980) understood that every organization has a culture that, “organizations are culture-bound. This applies not only to the behavior of people within organizations and to the functioning of organizations as a whole; even the theories developed to explain behavior in organizations reflect the national culture of their author, and so do the methods and techniques that are suggested for the management of organizations” (p.372). A major multiple-country study by Hofstede (1980) identified cultural variability on four dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity. His survey of a large multinational business organization in 40 countries in 1968 and 1972 identified the four dimensions based on theoretical

reasoning and statistical analysis of more than 116,000 responses to questions about values of the employees. For each dimension, he created an index to rank the scores of the responses by country. The higher the index score, the more likely that country reflected that particular dimension. If a country had a high index score for the individualism dimension, it resembled an individualistic culture; a high score on collectivism resembled a collectivistic culture. For the individualism and collectivism dimension, a collectivistic culture supported the notion that “people belong to ingroups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty,” whereas an individualistic culture supported the notion that “people are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family only” (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, p.419). Thus, Hofstede (1980) showed the levels of independence and dependence in the organization.

Similar to Hofstede, Hall (1976), an anthropologist, recognized that cultures exist in the organization and looked at the unstated realm of culture in communication. “Culture is man’s medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including show of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized, as well as how economic and government systems are put together and function” (1976, p.14).

Thus, Hall (1976) sought to identify verbal and nonverbal communication as high- or low-context communication - depending on how the language was used to accomplish communication goals (Lim, 2002, p.72). Hall identified a high-context

communication as where “most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message,” whereas in low-context communication “the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code” (Hall, 1976, p.79). High context is indirect communication among individuals, whereas low context is direct communication among individuals.

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) found a connection between Hall and Hofstede’s schema of culture. “All cultures Hall labels as low-context are individualistic, given Hofstede’s scores, and all of the cultures Hall labels as high-context are collectivistic in Hofstede’s schema. It therefore, appears that low- and high-context communication are the predominant forms of communication in individualistic and collectivistic cultures respectively” (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p.44).

Overall, organizational culture theory has gathered support through the work of those in business management, anthropology and other fields mentioned above. For example, Hofstede’s (1980) survey research identified, in the business management field, that employees in an organization can and do have different values of cooperation; it also identified how they work with each other and how this is supported in one workplace culture, rather than in another. In the anthropological field, Hall’s (1976) research showed the type of communication among employees in an organization can be implicit and explicit and illustrated how this contributes to the communication goals of working together in the organization. It further demonstrated how this type of communication is supported more in one workplace culture than in another. Organizational culture does exist; cultures have members who are predominantly independent or dependent on each other in completing work, and communication in these cultures either is predominantly

more explicit or implicit, depending on how independent and dependent the members in the organization are to each other. We can more deeply examine organizational culture theory by researching the independence and the dependence among members within organizational workgroups and the extent of collaboration that occurs amongst these workgroups. By going deeper and by looking at workgroups, we can understand the type of organizational culture that is supported and know how much the members work and communicate together.

As it relates to this study, an examination of the role of workgroups among journalists in the newsroom and their collaboration can be a starting point. But first, we must understand what prior studies say about behavior of groups and teams in the organization and how collaboration has been examined. Understanding how people work together in groups or teams and how this supports cooperation will form the foundation for the research questions for this study.

### **2.3 ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR IN GROUPS AND TEAMS**

As mentioned earlier, organizational theory has consisted of several schools of thought which ranged from “classical” to “cultural.” During the last century, another school of thought emphasized the behavior of individuals in the organization or “human relations.” Not until the 1930s did the human relations aspect of the equation become a field of study. This change was attributed to Mayo (1933) and his colleagues of the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company. His work examined the relations between work conditions and the incidents of fatigue in workers and recognized a larger influence, particularly in the social organization of the workgroup. In these experiments,

the researchers realized: an organization cannot change as a result of only changing the physical environment. Nor could they change the people - because of their attitudes and associations they bring with them into the workplace from their associations with other groups and their family. Nor could they ignore the history of the individuals involved and how they interact with others in the workplace (See Roethlisberger, 1941 in Ott, Parkes & Simpson, 2003). The Hawthorne experiments showed that all these aspects influence the way individuals work and cooperate in the organization, as well as how they adapt if something is changed in the workplace.

...the worker is not an isolated atomic individual; he is a member of a group or of groups. Within each of these groups the individuals have feelings and sentiments toward each other, which bind them together in collaborative effort. Moreover, these collective sentiments can, and do, become attached to every item and object in the industrial environment (See Roethlisberger in Ott, Parkes & Simpson, 2003, p.149).

His study later influenced Drucker (1959) and McGregor (1960). Thus, organizational behavior “is the actual behavior of individuals and groups in and around purposeful organizations” (p.1) and “is one of several frameworks or perspectives on what makes an organization work” (Ott, Parkes & Simpson, 2003, p.2).

### **2.3.1 Groups**

As the behavior of individuals became an area of study, scholars began to look at group structure and its dynamics in the organization through the contributions of Lewin in the 1930s and the others. Drucker (1959) and McGregor (1960) stated that the notion of organizations as functioning by individual contributions was no longer applicable. They argued that an organization needs groups of individuals because work in this post-

industrial and complex world requires multiple people and resources for the completion of tasks and services. Both authors had a post-modern view as to how the business world was changing from an industrial era to one of knowledge.

Cartwright and Zander (1953, 1960, 1968) in *Group Dynamics*, identified several perspectives to studying groups. They said group dynamics consisted of “a field of inquiry dedicated to advancing knowledge about the nature of groups, the laws of their development, and their interrelations with individuals, other groups and larger institutions” (p.7). According to Cartwright and Zander (1953, 1960, 1968) the notion of group dynamics was a contribution by Lewin as well as several others – including the development of social group work, group psychotherapy, education, and administration (the management of large organizations). These works established the importance of groups in the workplace and how they could be analyzed.

Hackman and Oldham (1980) identified that in some cases the tasks required in the workplace had to be done by a group. They acknowledged groups can combine contributions to make a product better than if completed alone. However, their perspective focused on design, “It depends on whether the group and its task are *well designed*” (p.163). They focused particularly on the task, composition and norms of the group and creating the conditions that will lead to team effectiveness, “By creating a motivating group task, a well-composed group, and group norms favoring open discussion of performance strategies, we believe the *chances* are increased that group members will invest themselves in their work and perform it relatively well” (p.189)

Over time this focus would shift. One contribution came from Janis (1971), who extensively studied the concept of groupthink and how a group that seeks to be non-

conflictive and cohesive may make decisions hastily, without considering consequences. This can then lead to poor decisions, lowered performance suffers or mistakes. This landmark study influenced others to investigate the performance of decisions and tasks within the team structure.

### **2.3.2 Teams**

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) helped to define the structure and purpose of a team as “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (p.45).

Over time, various perspectives on teams were proposed. These proposals included the works by Galegher, Kraut and Egido (1990), who focused on the knowledge sharing between individuals in teams, whereas Osburn, Moran, Musselwhite, Zenger and Perrin (1990) centered on the self-directed work team and self-managing teams (Wageman, 1997) that could operate and run on their own without additional supervision in the performance and completion of tasks. Others (ex., Fischer & Boynton, 2005) identified the role of the virtuoso team and how this kind of team plays by different rules. Their analysis of 20 companies found that traditional teams differed from virtuoso teams, who are defined as “elite experts in their particular fields and are specially convened for ambitious projects” (p.118). These virtuoso teams focus on the individual versus collective contribution, and the team focuses on ideas instead of tasks. These virtuoso teams have to work together in close proximity, and seek to exceed expectations of the customer and/or market (p.121). Many of these findings contradicted the notions of the

traditional team. However, these studies all articulated the differences in the use of a team and its ability to help organizations complete tasks.

By 1997, Bennis published an article about the notion of groups' ability to perform better at tasks than individuals, a notion that once again would place the structure of the group at the forefront of scholarly study of the organization, "...because the problems we face are too complex to be solved by any one person or any one discipline. Our only chance is to bring people together from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines who can refract a problem through the prism of complementary minds allied in common purpose" (Bennis, 1997, p. 29)

Thus, the workgroup as originally studied by Lewin in the 1930s resurfaced as a structure requiring analysis of the performance and the completion of multiple tasks. As Greenbaum and Query (1999) stated the role of working in groups in the workplace is more important than ever:

A large amount of both the running of daily operations and the planning of substantial organizational change is now initiated and carried out at the group or team level (Beckhard, 1969), especially in those organizations seeing to follow a participative model (Ancona, 1990). Organizational decision making, thus, has increasingly shifted from a single executive to committees, task forces, and teams charged with identifying problems, proposing solutions and implementing policies( p.539).

Despite these advancements, scholars also focused on virtual teams and on networks (Lipnack & Stamps, 1999). This may be attributed to Charan (1991), whose observations of 10 companies over four years revealed that networks helped large organizations change and innovate while remaining simultaneously competitive in the marketplace.

### **2.3.3 Collaboration**

As a result of these studies and a natural progression of how scholars understood organizations and how people work in an organization, collaboration became a logical part of how tasks could be done in the workplace. Collaboration was not necessarily called as such in previous studies instead, as the concepts of “cooperation” and “collective work.”

Deutsch (1949, 1968) identified in his study of psychology students the effects of cooperation and of competition and its relation to dependency. He found that group productivity can result when the members are cooperative rather than competitive, “The communication of ideas, coordination of efforts, friendliness, and pride in one’s effectiveness appear to be disrupted when members see themselves to be competing for mutually exclusive goals”(See Deutsch in Cartwright & Zander, 1968, p. 482).

Drucker (1959) also proposed, but did not directly define, collaboration in that he stated the individual working alone for the organization is no longer the norm, “a new idea of social order in which society and individual become mutually dependent poles of human freedom and achievement” (p.xi). McGregor (1960) also alluded to collaboration in discussing how it can be achieved between individuals and the potentials of teamwork in completion of tasks:

We cannot hope much longer to operate the complex, interdependent, collaborative enterprise which is the modern industrial company on the completely unrealistic premise that it consists of individual relationships....The fundamental fact of man’s capacity to collaborate with his fellows in the face-to-face group will survive the fads and one day be recognized. Then, and only then, will management discover how seriously it has underestimated the true potential of its human resources (McGregor, 1960, p. 242).

Despite the implicit identification of collaboration by Drucker and McGregor, we can consider the definition of the collaborative work environment by Kraus (1984) that has similar aims of Drucker and McGregor. “Collaboration is a cooperative venture based on shared power and authority. It is nonhierarchical in nature. It assumes power based on a knowledge or expertise as opposed to power based on role or role function” (Kraus, 1984, p. 19). A collaborative organization utilizes shared power, participative decision-making, is nonhierarchical, focuses on functions not roles, operates as an open system, recognizes ongoing processes for feedback, evaluation and modification, and fosters interdependence (Kraus, 1984, pp.20-21)

Workplace collaboration has been defined by some (Cross, Martin, & Weiss, 2006) as a way of managing the networks of individuals in the organization more effectively from an economic perspective by the relationships, the costs and the benefits of the interactions between these networks and how value can be created as a result of these networks of individuals: “executives must reorient them toward the revenue and productivity benefits that collaborative interactions generate, the costs such interactions impose, and opportunities to improve connectivity at the points that create the greatest economic value (p.2).” A recent report (Bryan, Matson & Weiss, 2007) proposed that informal social networks of individuals in the workplace can contribute to more knowledge and to more information sharing and make it a more collaborative work environment:

Just as formal hierarchical structures define management roles, formal network structures define collaborative professional ones.....By participating in more than one network at a time, talented workers would gain the ability to integrate

knowledge and access to talent across a number of communities. A person in the retail-banking community could also be a member of a branding community, for example, and members could bring knowledge gained there into other communities (Bryan, Matson & Weiss, 2007).

However, a work environment is not without problems and conflict. In a non-collaborative environment, conflict arises from a top-down management structure where employees compete for status, prestige and power (via a different position, more responsibility or recognition in their job) in the organization. Whereas in a collaborative work environment, conflict arises from legitimate differences where employees relinquish control of others in the workplace and both commit and invest in the organization, not the self (Kraus, 1984, p.193). Weiss and Hughes (2005) identified that collaboration also can be a part of the conflict management process in the organization when managers take specific steps to manage conflict on a daily basis. “Most companies respond to the challenge of improving collaboration in entirely the wrong way. They focus on the symptoms rather than on the root cause of failures in cooperation: conflict. The fact is, you can’t improve collaboration until you’ve addressed the issue of conflict” (p.93). Furthermore, Weiss and Hughes (2005) identify that instituting a team structure in an organization does not necessarily assist with collaboration: “Teamwork training offers little guidance on how to work together in the context of competing objectives and limited resources....People who need to collaborate more effectively usually don’t need to align around and work toward a common goal. They need to quickly and creatively solve problems by managing the inevitable conflict so that it works in their favor” (p.95).

Evans and Wolf (2005) argued that high-performance organizations can achieve collaboration with a combination of managerial techniques and a community of sharing

information. They suggested collaboration can be achieved by deploying collaborative technology, by keeping work visible to everyone, by building communities of trust within the organization, by thinking modularly instead of linearly, and by encouraging group versus individual structures within the organization (p. 99).

Recently, Gratton and Erickson (2007) found that collaboration among teams can be achieved but often the characteristics of the team such as size, location of participation (virtual or not), diversity, and the specialized skills and knowledge of the team members actually can hinder the team's working collaboratively. In their analysis of 55 large teams of multinational companies that included two media companies (BBC and Reuters) they identified eight factors that can facilitate successful collaboration: open floor plans, management reflecting collaborative behavior that is visible to others in the organization, supporting mentoring and coaching within the organization, having human resources teach employees the basics of relationship and communication building, developing a sense of community that will instill a level of care among the employees, assigning team leaders that are task-and relationship-oriented, helping people to grow more familiar with each other and establish relationships that will build trust, and clearly assigning roles and tasks to team members to avoid issues of confusion and cooperation (p. 104).

So, these studies suggest that collaboration consists of a horizontal line of authority, it focuses on functions versus roles, and decision-making as well as responsibilities are shared. This collaboration can be achieved and can help an organization to perform better and more efficiently. On the other hand, it also can cause more conflict and confusion. The scholarship also suggests collaboration can be implemented within a team structure, but this may not be as ideal as it is for the

workgroup. In sum, these studies demonstrate mixed results as to collaboration in the organization. More investigation into this area is needed. Thus, this study will focus on the group structure in collaborative work processes because that focus can confirm the culture of an organization and how the organization performs when members in the workplace work and communicate together on tasks rather than acting individually.

#### **2.3.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Overall, this organizational literature confirms: (1) that organizational cultures do exist; (2) organizational cultural theory can include the study of teams or groups; and, (3) among teams, the extent of collaboration has shown conflicting results in comparison to the workgroup. Thus, we can advance organizational cultural theory by looking at how workgroups in the organization operate and collaborate. By examining the workgroup in the organization, we can further understand how members in an organization communicate and work together to complete their tasks and how this contributes to making a culture. A culture consists of people, resources, artifacts, history, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that also define their system and their structure. Based on the findings from the Hawthorne experiments, it follows that an organization neither can operate nor be defined by a series of processes and systems without considering the “human” component of how people work and communicate together (See Rothlisberger, 1941 in Ott, Parkes & Simpson, 2003). An example of applying this logic to an organization can be the newsroom and how the journalists communicate and work together to complete tasks and how this contributes to the making of a specific culture. The next section will detail exactly how this organizational culture can be linked to the

newsroom by the application of Hofstede's (1980) and Hall's (1976) schema of workplace culture.

## **2.4 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE NEWSROOM**

### **2.5 CULTURE IN THE NEWSROOM**

This section will expand our application of organization cultural theory by applying the schema of Hofstede (1980) and Hall (1976) to the newsroom culture. In understanding the organization and the structure of how journalists work, it is necessary to understand the culture of that workplace. We need to know what resources, artifacts, attitudes, beliefs and assumptions are embedded in the newsroom itself that define it as well as the people who work in it. These are components of a culture and demonstrate how an organization operates, how the people within it communicate with each other, and how they complete tasks.

A news organization can and does reflect a certain culture. "... organizations are culture-bound. This applies not only to the behavior of people within organizations and to the functioning of organizations as a whole; even the theories developed to explain behavior in organizations reflect the national culture of their author, and so do the methods and techniques that are suggested for the management of organizations" (Hofstede, 1980, p.372) People behave, communicate, think, and feel in different ways that reflect their sentiments (beliefs, values, attitudes, assumptions, etc.) and their associations with people (family, friends, co-workers, etc.) and they bring this into the organization. These traits ultimately contribute to a culture.

Table 2.1 Collectivism and individualism characteristics\*

<b>Collectivism characteristics</b>	<b>Individualism characteristics</b>
Focus on ingroup's goals	Focus on individual's goals
Emphasis on fitting into ingroups	Emphasis on self-realization
"We" identity emphasized	"I" identity emphasized
Particularistic	Universalistic
Allocentrism	Idiocentrism
High-context communication	Low-context communication

\*Note: Excerpt of characteristics as they appeared in a table republished here by Gudykunst and Kim (2003, p. 62)

As shown in Table 2.1, one illustration of culture involves the extent to which the members of the organization depend on each other in exchange for loyalty to the group or, conversely, how independently they work in exchange for self-interests. For example, Breed's (1955) study of social control in the newsroom identified two of six factors that promote policy conformity because of the independence or the dependence of groups in the organization. One factor included the self-interests of the staffers observed via their obligation to and their esteem for their superiors in the performance of their job, as well as their aspirations for higher status in the news operation or field by getting their own stories on the front page often. A second factor for policy conformity included the staffers feeling part of an "in-group" and sharing a common work interest in getting the news, as well as following the status quo of the model group versus bringing in their own personal ideals into the group to complete work. Thus, the study showed support of the

type of culture that focuses on the independence of group members and their self-interests, yet also showed support of the type of culture that focuses on the interdependence of members and greater good for the group. Hofstede suggests that an organization's levels of dependence can be tied to an individualism and collectivism schema. "More collectivist societies call for greater emotional dependence of members on their organizations; in a society in equilibrium, the organizations should in return assume a broad responsibility for their members" (Hofstede, 1980, p.217). Thus, Hofstede helps explain one form of a culture that we may find in the newsroom. For example, a collectivistic culture in a news organization would mean that members work to help the company's interests (i.e. seek recognition, prestige or mastery amongst competitors in the industry) whereas members in an individualistic culture would work to advance themselves through the company for their own self-interests (promotion of position, recognition or reward of work, prestige or honor given). Newsroom discourse also would reveal the culture of the organization. As shown in Table 2.1, a member in a collectivistic culture would state, "*We* are doing this," or "*We* are doing that," whereas someone in an individualistic culture would state, "*I* am doing this," or "*I* am doing that." One culture works for the greater good of the group (collectivistic) whereas the other is focused on individuals and their needs and wants (individualistic).

So, this schema of collectivism and individualism provides a possible foundation for understanding newsroom culture. As mentioned in the introduction, many news organizations are undergoing a transformation, particularly in how they produce news for their websites. These online operations require journalists to work efficiently and to get

news quickly posted on the site. Does this process affect how journalists work? Do they work together collaboratively? Do they work individually? One can observe the work through Hofstede's (1980) collectivistic and individualistic schema of culture.

Another view to collectivism/individualism can be traced back to Ferdinand Tönnies and his dichotomy of *Gemeinschaft* (representing a folk community) and *Gesellschaft* (representing a modern, industrial society) to demonstrate the role of the individual in a large city and the role of the community in a small village. Other examples of how to identify the individual and the collective have included politics and the rights and freedoms of the collective or individual (i.e. de Tocqueville) as well as in science with Fleck's notion of the individual versus thought collective in the genesis and development of scientific facts. Hofstede's book on *Culture's Consequences* (1980) also has served as the prominent work in describing workplace cultures around the world in the last century. For example, we can see how Hofstede has examined the cultures of United States and Mexico.

### **2.5.1 International Cultures in the Workplace**

Hofstede found among employees from a multinational organization from Mexico earned a score of 30 for the individualism dimension while the employees in the United States earned a score of 91 (Hofstede, 1980). As mentioned previously, with a higher number, both the employees and the workplace were more likely individualistic in nature, and the lower the number, the employees and workplace was more likely collectivistic. Studies have identified a collective versus individualistic culture in Latin America (Diaz-

Guerrero, 1967; Lisansky, 1981; Diaz-Guerrero & Szalay, 1991) and Mexico (Diaz-Guerrero, 1967; Diaz-Guerrero & Szalay, 1991).

Three recent viewpoints support the use of Hofstede's schema in social science that are not from the journalism or from the communication field but rather hold relevant findings that contribute to the use of this schema in this dissertation. Oyserman, Coon and Kimmelmeier (2002) found that overall it is a valid construct to show how Americans differ from other countries and that the schema does indeed influence psychological processes. But, the authors noted that replications have been dissimilar, thus questioning its reliability (Oyserman, Coon & Kimmelmeier, 2002, p. 43). But Schimmack, Oishi and Diener (2005) argued individualism does help to explain cultural variability (p.25). Brewer and Chen's (2007) conceptualization tool helped to make distinctions between individualism, relational collectivism, and group collectivism (p.147).

Scholars in the organizational and the business management fields have found Hofstede's schema applicable in describing workplace cultures in United States and Mexico. Fernandez, Carlson, Stepina and Nicholson (1997) re-examined Hofstede's country classifications using business professionals and students and in doing so identified similar results to Hofstede's original study but with some variation. "The United States scored the highest on this dimension (i.e. individualism versus collectivism), making it the most individualistic country in the present survey, a conclusion in accordance with Hofstede's reports, which classified the United States as the most individualistic country in the world. Mexico was also above the mean in the

present study, making it an individualistic country” (Fernandez, Carlson, Stepina & Nicholson, 1997).

However, variation in Hofstede’s scores arose. Merritt (2000) surveyed the national culture of 9,400 commercial airline pilots from 19 countries using Hofstede’s four dimensions. The survey used the work values survey from Hofstede within a flight management attitudes questionnaire from 1993 to 1997. Merritt (2000) found that the individualism dimension rank of 23 for Mexico in comparison to 30 for Hofstede, and 32 for the United States in comparison to 91 for Hofstede. Despite these differences, these rankings were found to be highly correlated (.90) with the previous rankings from Hofstede’s original study, thus making the individualism-collectivism dimension one of the strongest results in the study. Merritt (2000) acknowledged some of the ranks were higher and less variable than Hofstede and this may be attributed to convergence with more modern individualistic values in the workplace today, “The study confirms that the effects of national culture can be seen over and above the professional pilot culture, and that one-size-fits-all training is not appropriate” (Merritt, 2000, p.299). Thus, the United States and Mexico showed greater differences from Hofstede but this may reflect the effects of a combination of cultures.

However, in another study, the United States culture showed its tendency to reflect an individualistic culture. Oudenhoven (2001) examined Hofstede’s classification of national cultures by surveying more than 800 students of economics, business administration and management in the United States and in Europe. The United States came in close to the scale of being individualistic compared to Hofstede’s original score

for the United States. The authors concluded that there may be a question over whether national cultures remain the same or converge in time. “Taken together this pattern of results may be seen as a sign of a growing convergence of national organization cultures. Global market integration and internationalization (Americanization) of management literature lead to a reduction of national differences of organization cultures” (p.102)

These studies that demonstrate the individualism and collectivism dimensions still are useful when examining and describing work organizations in other countries. In particular, a few of the studies did show conflicting results as to the consistency of individualism in the U.S. culture and collectivism in the Mexican culture. However, the overall results between these two countries remain fairly true to the original findings that Hofstede presented in 1980.

Thus, we can identify cultural differences between workplaces in the United States and Mexico in these three studies (Hofstede, 1980; Fernandez, Carlson, Stepina & Nicholson, 1997; Merritt, 2000). It also is necessary to discuss how different cultures may support a collaborative or individualistic work environment. Previous scholarship in organizational and business management literature (Earley, 1993; 1994; Moorman & Blakely, 1995; Wagner, 1995; Eby & Dobbins, 1997) have found connections between work groups, collective activity and the individualism and collectivism schema.

Earley (1993) conducted an experiment with managers in China, Israel, and the US on workgroups and their performance using the Hofstede schema. China and Israel were identified as collectivistic cultures and the US as an individualistic culture. The experiment results showed that the performance (measured by the number of correctly

completed tasks done in a one hour) in the work group was lower for individualists than for collectivists. Collectivists showed to have lower performance when working alone than when working in a group. Working in a group allowed collectivists to bolster group and self efficacy (pp.340-341). Thus, the study showed that the collectivistic culture supported the workgroup structure more than working alone.

Earley (1994) conducted another experiment with managers in China and the US on training and its relationship to self-efficacy and performance. They found that individualists (US) had a stronger impact on self-efficacy and performance through self-training than group-focused training. Collectivists (China) had a stronger impact on self-efficacy and performance through group-focused training. Thus, this study showed how the group structure of training in the workplace helped in the collectivistic culture whereas the self-training in the workplace was more supported in an individualistic workplace culture.

Moorman and Blakely (1995) identified how organizational citizenship behaviors (likelihood to help out in the company for the sake of the entity itself) will be likely if an individual has collectivistic norms and values. They examined this dimension from within one culture and how individual difference can explain variance in organizational behavior based on a survey of employees from a U.S. company. They concluded that organizational citizenship behavior can be identified in the workplace by observing how collectivistic norms and values influences interpersonal helping, individual initiatives, and loyal boosterism. They also found that the individual and the work environment supported an environment where collectivistic norms and values can be nurtured for

organizational citizenship behavior to occur (p.137). Thus, a workplace that is supportive of a collectivistic culture can enhance and make it likely for employees in the workplace to help and to assist others without prompting as part of the organizational citizenship behavior.

Wagner (1995) collected data among US college students via experiment and questionnaire to identify how group size, how identifiability (the degree to which others can observe and assess an individual's behavior), how levels of individualism and how collectivism influence cooperation in groups. He found that group size, identifiability, and low shared responsibility were associated with cooperation. He also concluded that those who were individualistic were less likely to engage in cooperative behavior in comparison to collectivists, thus demonstrating how cooperation in groups is more supported within a collectivistic culture than an individualistic culture.

Eby and Dobbins (1997) identified how collectivism as an individual difference and as a group composition variable can help to identify how collectivistic orientation works in organizational teams. They conducted an experiment with 33 teams and found a team's collectivistic composition affects performance by influencing cooperative behavior (p. 289). Thus, this study demonstrated that the use of the Hofstede schema for groups and how cooperation was impacted when the environment supported a collectivistic orientation.

These studies demonstrate that workgroups have been examined from the Hofstede schema, and have also shown that the group structure in the workplace is supportive in a collectivistic culture among individuals of a collectivistic orientation.

Cooperation, the performance, and self-efficacy have shown to have positive influences when in a collectivistic versus individualistic culture. Can a collectivistic culture in the workplace show more prominently in one country than another?

Cultural variability between the US and Mexico media systems may shed light on how different media systems evolve in different places. As mentioned in the introduction, much of the scholarship on US newsrooms identified an individualistic culture. As to the culture of the newsroom in Mexico, studies of the routines in the news production process in Mexico showed similar findings to their U.S. counterparts. These influential studies examined the routines within television and print newsrooms (Gonzalez Molina 1987; Cervantes Barba, 1993; Hernandez-Ramirez, 1995, 1997; Hernandez 1992). The Gonzalez Molina (1987) study of the television news programming of a major television consortium found that the corporation's influence, particularly through the segmentation of audience, centralization of corporate spokespersonship, promotion of corporate interests, and structuring the news into entertainment had the largest impact on the news production process within this organization (p.165). Hernandez (1992) found in her study of a radio news station in Mexico that the structure (i.e. the formats and space limitations in the newsgathering and reporting stage) within the organization had a greater influence on the news production process that resulted in several limitations on the journalists in their day-to-day work (pp.100-101).

These studies identify a similar hierarchical and individualistic structure in the United States because of the way in which the journalists work individually versus in groups and because of top-down management processes used for managing the

newsroom. However, in recent years, U.S. newsrooms have been making efforts to work more collectively. We may find this in the implementation of the involvement of the news citizen in the news process, for example, in crowdsourcing, a term defined by *Wired* reporter, Jeff Howe (2006a) to describe the market and variety of industries that are implementing crowdsourcing techniques. Crowdsourcing is the act of collective work from the public to help with the contribution of a service or product. However, these efforts of crowdsourcing in journalism have been small and not widespread. For example, Gannett Corporation announced in 2006 that it would “use crowdsourcing methods to put readers to work as watchdogs, whistle-blowers and researchers in large, investigative features” (Howe, 2006b). The method’s success still is undetermined.

The current state of journalism in Mexico also may be revealing a collective culture on the rise. Recently, there has been a focus on documenting the period in which Mexican journalists built the “Fourth Estate” (Lawson, 2002) because of the political, cultural and social changes that occurred in the latter part of the last century. The “Fourth Estate” in general terms can be defined as the “press,” but in this context also can be considered a press that was part of a new, emerging system of journalism in Mexico. This change contributed to a more free press in Mexico, creating a new media environment that supports a more watchdog (Waisbord, 2000) and/or civic form of journalism (Hughes, 2006) in the country. “Trends over the two last decades offer grounds for optimism about the future evolution of Mexico’s press. Continued market competition will further undermine official control. Opposition victories at the state and the federal level will undoubtedly advance media opening by reforming the country’s archaic media

laws and restructuring the system for allocating broadcasting concessions (among other things)” (Lawson, 2002, p.175). Scholarship in recent years has identified that the journalistic model that some Mexican media systems currently follow may have a tendency to support a more collaborative and less individualistic model of news production. “In the civic model, news media provide information that helps citizens communicate their needs to government, hold government accountable, and foster deliberation and debate. This is accomplished by providing a two-way system of communication between government and citizens, acting as a monitor on governmental behavior, and providing information from many perspectives.” (Hughes, 2006, p.4).

In summary, organizations can reflect a collectivistic or individualistic culture. Organizations also show that depending on if the work can be done individually or as a group also can reflect a form of the individualistic or collectivistic culture. In addition, these cultures can differ by country, as demonstrated here by the examples given between the United States and Mexico.

However, stating that an organization has a collectivistic or an individualistic culture is too general. A more precise approach recognizes that a setting has some levels of collectivism and of individualism in its culture. Triandis (1995) proposed as much, suggesting that some attributes are more likely than others. “We are all collectivists but some of us are also individualists” (p.37). He considers this infrastructure across horizontal and vertical continua in which people can be collectivist and individualistic (Triandis, 1995, p.131). Another way of looking at this is via the analogy of ice and

water. Triandis (1989) stated that collectivism is like water and individualism is like ice.

Ice can melt back into water and vice versa, depending on the situation:

The molecules of ice correspond to particular relationships of the individual with friends, co-workers, neighbors, those with similar demographic attributes, those with whom the individual experiences common fate and who are similar in attitudes....there are different kinds of individualism and different kinds of collectivism, depending on whether the predominance of the molecules are water or have been transformed into ice (Triandis, 1989, pp.43-44).

Molecules of water can represent the relationships between co-workers that stay together like an organization and the workers depend on each other and work together to remain in their state as water. When they are no longer needed to work together or depend on each other, the molecules will separate and change their state to ice, or the workers in the organization will start working independently. However, this change between ice and water happens constantly and no one state stays remains depending on the situation. So a workplace can undergo moments of work that is done together and work that is done independently of each other.

Thus, an online news operation can have a collectivistic and individualistic culture. Members work in exchange for the loyalty of the group or the organization and also may work in exchange for their own self-interests. However, according to Triandis (1995), one culture may possess more prominent characteristics. But whether an online news operation with more collectivistic culture characteristics shows more collaboration between journalists versus one with a more individualistic culture where the journalists may work independently can be difficult to answer because scholarship does not show results of a collectivistic culture among journalists. Studies of newsrooms, as the next

section illustrates, have shown journalists tend to operate in an individualistic culture supported through professionalism and routines in the newsroom.

### **2.5.2 Culture promoted by professionalism in the newsroom**

Professionalism in the newsroom often is communicated through the policies a news organization sets. For example, Breed's (1955) study looked at how policy within the newspaper organization was maintained among the staff. He defined policy "as the more or less consistent orientation shown by a paper, not only in its editorial but in its news columns and headlines as well, concerning selected issues and events" (p.327). The journalists' established daily routines included following the orientation of the ways in which they covered certain issues and events and how they wrote about them in the press. These policies were followed also because of the journalists' need for respect and for recognition from management and from their peers.

Breed (1955) divided the professional norms into two: "technical norms deal with the operations of efficient news gathering, writing, and editing; ethical norms embrace the newsman's obligation to his readers and to his craft and include such ideals as responsibility, impartiality, accuracy, fair play, and objectivity" (p. 327). Thus the professional norms supported how policy was implemented in the newsroom. Professionalism in the newsroom also would show how journalists adopted and achieved goals in an organization, their cohesiveness in groups, and the control the editorial group had over the staff (Matejko, 1967). For example, Matejko (1967) found that the

atmosphere contributes to the cohesiveness among the journalists and how this translates to the professionalism and standards upheld in the news they print:

The standard of the paper depends on the talents and enthusiasm of its editorial staff. Hence the atmosphere of the office must be such as to promote the individual and collective initiative of the staff. In all the offices investigated in our survey, both the editors and the more humble employees alike are jointly interested in keeping up the level of the paper (p.172).

Newsroom routines contribute to professionalism in how objectivity is upheld, how the journalists are rewarded, and how professional and economic goals are met. (Soloski, 1989). For example, Soloski (1989) identified that journalists are not rewarded on the professional ladder in the same way other professions are rewarded (i.e., with a promotion to management). Soloski (1989) stated that promotions to management are possible but that it was more likely that successful journalists move horizontally within the organization and receive more autonomy to pursue stories without having more responsibility, further helping their career and establishing a chance for loyalty among staff without giving them additional power in the organization (p.217). Thus, the routine of doing good work is rewarded and also carries the attainment of a better career on the professional ladder. The routines in the newsroom also manifest in the journalist's self-identity and their role from informant to an adversary or watchdog for the citizens (Wilke 1998; Waisbord, 2000; Hughes, 2006) through the techniques they use to gather and interview sources for a story, to the way they report the news.

These studies suggest that journalists work in a culture that enforces news policy and tasks that are either for self-promotion or as a community service. However, studies (Breed, 1955; Matejko, 1967; Soloski, 1989) overwhelmingly show more support of

journalists working for their self-promotion. The established newsroom guidelines and policies as to how news is reported and is presented are supported by the professionalism – technical skills and ethical judgment as Soloski states - that is required to perform these functions. As a result, the professionalism is supported by motivations and by interests that can be individualistic. These studies (Breed, 1955; Matejko, 1967; Soloski, 1989) demonstrate how much the individualistic culture of self-interests and the independent nature of the journalist are ingrained in the professionalism via the values and beliefs communicated by other journalists as well as by management.

Another aspect that can show the dominance of an individualistic culture in the news organization is in which the way routines are set in the news production process. This warrants attention because, as discussed earlier, an organizational culture consists of several aspects that include resources and artifacts used in the workplace and tied to routines that are the processes by which work is completed. These routines are at times explicitly explained (i.e. use of associated press style in newswriting) but in some cases these journalistic routines have become so embedded in that they are implicit (gatekeeping) and we often neglect to see that they dominate the organizational culture.

### **2.5.3 Culture promoted by routines in the newsroom**

Many scholars who have examined the routines of journalists revealed that news production relies on a process that is individually led and hierarchical in structure. By hierarchical, they mean a top-down management structure of editors who instruct reporters on what news to cover and on how it will be presented. This structure has its

roots in gatekeeping, defined as an individual or an editor having the control over what goes in the news (White, 1950; Geiber 1956; Snider, 1967). “Gate sections are governed either by impartial rules or by “gatekeepers.” In the latter case an individual or group is “in power” for making the decision between ‘in’ or ‘out’ ” (Lewin, 1947, p.145).

According to Shoemaker and Reese, a gatekeeper helps to routinize the news flow:

“Many routines are designed to help the organization cope with physical constraints. The very term ‘gatekeeper’ suggests the idea of adapting to physical limits” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p.119). Gatekeeping helped explain how newsroom routines have been individually led. This form of work, particularly from the standpoint of how and what news is published, helps to describe a part of the culture that has an individualistic versus a collective focus of work. For example, White (1950) showed the influences of the gatekeeper function were based on his or her experiences, attitudes, and expectations he or she brought to the job and how this impacted the selected news (White, 1950; Snider, 1967).

In addition, scholars also identified an assembly-line process in the newsroom, an important discovery because previous research did not enumerate a news production process in this manner. This also proved to be an important finding for newsroom culture because it demonstrated the organizational “systems” approach to a workplace that ignores the “human” element that contributes to the culture in an organization. Bantz, McCorkle, and Baade (1977) identified an assembly-line process in which the newswork could fit into five steps: story ideation, task assignment, gather and structure materials, assemble materials, and presentation (Bantz, McCorkle, & Baade, 1977). This assembly

line process created a never-ending and stale cycle of media content (Gans, 1979) as well as limited content diversity (i.e. the same kinds of stories were being covered and published) and created issues (i.e. quick turn-over of employees in the company due to lack of opportunities among employees) with staff retention and loyalty. The argument may be made that assembly line process can be a collective or a collaborative activity, since it involves several individuals; but the step-by-step tasks that executed in a specific order in the assembly line process contradict the notion of a collective or collaborative activity, which does not require a specific order and in which tasks may be done by several individuals at the same time.

In summary, gatekeeper routinization and assembly-line structure of work is embedded in the newsroom culture. Routinization supports a specific structure of how what is or is not covered in the news, what constitutes a correction, and what constitutes a controversial matter or issue (Fishman, 1980). The ways in which the journalists do their work and what their work is helps to describe the artifacts and resources they use that is part of the culture. Journalists in the newsroom may be limited in what news they can cover or what information they can include in the stories because of management and its control over the news production process and the information being published. The control over the topics on which journalists report also contributes to what artifacts and resources the journalists use, which also describes a kind of culture. In summary, the research of the routines of journalists and the news production process has been investigated from a narrow perspective of the individual in a hierarchical system.

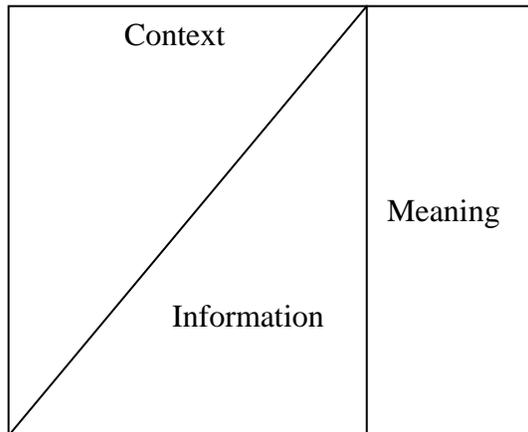
## **2.6 COMMUNICATION IN THE NEWSROOM**

In addition to understanding the overall culture of an organization, it is necessary to comprehend the use of communication in the culture, because such an understanding demonstrates what beliefs, assumptions, values, resources and artifacts are and how they are represented through the verbal and nonverbal interactions between members in the culture. Communication in the newsroom is another facet for examination in order to see how much of the information is implicit or explicit and how this can impact work and its completion. Understanding the forms of communication used can help show how tasks are done collaboratively when the communication between journalists is implicit or explicit, as well as show how much the culture supports a collective or individualistic form of working.

Verbal and nonverbal communication can be categorized as high-or low-context communication (Hall, 1976) depending on how language is used to accomplish communication goals (Lim, 2002, p.72). Context “is the information that surrounds an event and is inextricably bound up with meaning of that event. The elements that combine to produce a given meaning – events and context – are in different proportions depending on the culture. It is thus possible to order the cultures of the world on a scale from high to low context” (Hall & Hall, 1987, p.7). This may be exemplified by how much meaning and information are given in a conversation that warrants whether it is a high-context or low-context message. Thus, the ways in which individuals understand and interact with each other depends on the context they have regarding the information

they are sending and receiving – whether that information requires background information.

High Context



Low Context

Figure 2.2: High and low-context \*

\*As appeared (Hall, 1976, p.89)

Figure 2.2 shows where context fits in a message that contains information as well as meaning. The figure shows that high-context communication is towards the upper part of the continuum - with meaning and context - where less information is needed. Low-context communication is toward the lower part of the diagonal continuum, with meaning where more information is needed. Hall identified high-context communication as where “most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message” whereas in low context “the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code” (Hall, 1976, p.79).

High-context is indirect communication among individuals, whereas low context is direct communication among individuals. Thus, connecting forms of communication to collaboration allows us to know how much direct or indirect communication among members in an organization help or hinder cooperation among the members as well as help to identify an element of the culture in that organization.

People who communicate within a low-context culture belabor the obvious and are redundant, showing a more direct style of communication, whereas people who communicate within a high-context culture do not disclose much information demonstrating a more indirect style of communication (See Andersen, 2000 in Andersen, Hecht, Hoobler, & Smallwood, 2002, p.100). Other forms identifying differences between high-and low-context communication culture include: “Facial expressions, tension, movements, speed of interaction, location of the interaction” hold more meaning for high-context cultures; communicators expect others to understand moods, subtle gestures, and environmental clues that low-context cultures do not have (Andersen, Hecht, Hoobler, & Smallwood, 2002, p.100). Meaning also is another form identifying differences between the two because meaning is embedded in the high-context culture, making communication more necessary for the receiver to make interpretations. “High-context cultures make greater distinctions between insiders and outsiders than low-context cultures do. People raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do the participants in low-context systems. When talking about something that they have on their minds, a high-context individual will expect his interlocutor to know what’s bothering him, so that he doesn’t have to be specific” (Hall, 1976, p.98).

Table 2.2 High-and low-context attributes\*

<b>High-context attributes</b>	<b>Low-context attributes</b>
Preprogrammed information that is in the receiver and setting	Most of the information must be transmitted in the message to make up for what is missing
Economical, fast, efficient and satisfying, indirect	Highly-focused, slow, compartmentalized, direct
Restricted codes (words and sentences are collapsed and/or shortened)	Elaborated codes (words and sentences are extensive)
No need for detailed background information	Need for detailed background information
Easy flow of information – focus on the stored rather than transmitted information	Not an easy flow of information – focus on the transmitted rather than stored information
Fast messages include headlines, television, cartoons	Slow messages include books, poetry, print

\*Note: Compilation of attributes collected from (Hall, 1976, pp.74-101; Hall & Hall, 1987, pp.3-35)

As shown in Table 2.2, the attributes of high-and low-context are distinct. Thus, a high-context (HC) message occurs where most of the information either is in the physical context or internalized in the person, or hidden within the message transmitted. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is in the explicit code (Hall, 1976, p.79). This schema can provide additional information for understanding the culture in the newsroom and will serve as a benchmark for observing the communication in the two newsrooms in this dissertation. For example, as online news organizations undergo a social transformation in how they produce news for the

website, they require the journalists to work efficiently and quickly raising the question of whether implicit or explicit communication is more common in executing tasks.

Hall's schema also is connected to individualism-collectivism (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Gudykunst, Matsumoto, et al. 1996; Kim, 1994; Singelis & Brown 1995). Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) state that low-context communication cultures are individualistic and that high-context communication cultures are collectivistic (p.44). In particular, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) examine the logic of culture and communication that make these two schemas so connected:

“Communication and culture reciprocally influence each other. The culture from which individuals come affects the way they communicate, and the way individuals communicate can change the culture they share” (p.17) Thus collectivism is tied to high-context culture communication and individualism is tied to low-context communication culture. Individuals who depend on each other in a collectivistic culture will use communication filled with meaning and implicit codes, while individuals who are independent in an individualistic culture will use communication with others that is not filled with meaning and is explicit. However, this is not to say that the opposite cannot occur. Individuals in a collectivistic culture may just as often communicate explicitly with each other or use low-context communication; and those in an individualistic culture may just as much communicate implicitly with each other or use high-context communication.

Yet, scholars have shown promising tests of the schema working well together. For example, Singelis and Brown (1995) found that in an experiment conducted among

college students that cultural collectivism (the influence of separateness and connectedness of individuals through culture) was linked theoretically (via a hypothesized path-analytic model) and empirically to high-context communication at the cultural versus individual level: “High-context communicators seem to pay less attention to the subtle meanings of the words, but are influenced by the context in interpreting the meaning” (p.375). In particular, they found that when people were dependent on each other, they were more likely to pay more attention to implicit rather than explicit communication. For example, they found that when people were considered high-context communicators they interpreted more meaning from “so I should be there” as the meaning of “will be there” whereas low-context communicators took “so I should be there” at its face value (Singelis & Brown, 1995, p.375). Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Kim and Heyman (1996) found a different result: Individual-level factors were better predictors of low-and high-context communication styles than cultural-level factors. Nonetheless, both studies connected communication styles to a culture.

As to whether online journalists work collaboratively to get the job done more efficiently when communication is implicit or whether they work best when working individually and explicitly communicating can be difficult to answer. Scholarship shows traditional journalists work individually and when put together, they have been in teams. The next section details what studies determined about communication in a team structure.

### **2.6.1 Communication in Groups**

In the last two decades, scholars have examined journalists in the newsroom, particularly as teams (Stepp 1995; Sylvie, 1996; Lewis 1997; Hansen, Neuzil & Ward 1998; Neuzil, Hansen & Ward, 1999; Endres, Schierhorn & Schierhorn, 1999; Thornton 2006). A journalism team can consist of two or more journalists involved on a particular story or beat for the newspaper over time (Stepp 1995; Endres, Schierhorn & Schierhorn, 1999; Thornton 2006).

The concept of using teams and team reporting in the U.S. print newsroom began to spread in the 1980s, the result of the news industry aiming to keep costs low and productivity high. In the 1990s, journalism professor Buck Ryan introduced the “maestro concept” that incorporated news tasks into a team effort. “It’s a projects-based, team approach. It is a rarefied story planning process in which all the principals who are involved in the story get together at the beginning of the story” (“Improving Copy Desk Job Satisfaction,” 1997). By 1997, Mario Garcia, a faculty member of the Poynter Institute, promoted the WED concept combining the writing, editing and design aspects together. “It refers to the harmonious marriage of Writing, Editing and Design to produce a journalistic project that is more powerful than any one element in isolation” (Reason, 1997).

By 1995, several U.S. newsrooms used teams and team reporting (Stepp, 1995) in restructuring their news production processes. These processes aimed to flatten

hierarchies with less middle management, to decentralize power away from departments and sections, and to reorganize news and copy desks (Stepp, 1995, pp.29-30). As a result, scholars began to investigate the implications, particularly from the perspective of autonomy, performance, and quality of the news product. In all three, communication was not a big focus, but was measured with mixed results.

For example, once part of a team, the level of autonomy that journalists experience can affect the individual journalist and the news production process, particularly the power and autonomy in the kind of work done and the stories covered (Hansen, Neuzil & Ward, 1999), the harm to the individual journalist's creativity (Neuzil, Hansen & Ward, 1999), and teamwork's effectiveness and rewards (Thornton, 2006).

For example, Neuzil, Hansen and Ward (1999) examined how two newsrooms' topic team affected the journalist's power and authority when part of a team. The journalists of the two newsrooms said they felt they had less authority (52.6 percent) and those in teams with more than 11 people reported even less authority in their jobs (p.10). The authors concluded that the team system may do more harm than good:

In newsrooms filled with workers who pride themselves on their creativity, staffers may perceive that the team system simply multiplies the opportunities for meddling with individual creative effort. The comments from some of respondents confirmed that the team system was perceived as a means to garner more work out of fewer people, and for managers to exert more control over editorial content (p.14).

As for the role of team communication, results were negative. Topic teams demonstrated less communication with each other than before being in teams: Of the two newsrooms that were part of the census-survey 24 percent said they had less communication among

team members than before the team system was instituted and only 35 percent of those surveyed said communication had increased since being in the team system (the remaining 41 percent was not reported in the study). So in both forms, communication was worse (Neuzil, Hansen & Ward, 1999, pp.11-12) in the team structure. Overall, the study showed how the formation of a topic team can impact negatively the journalists' ability to perform and to communicate.

The performance of a team also can have mixed impacts. Scholars have shown teams' negative influence and how staff's performance decreased (Neuzil, Hansen & Ward, 1999), how the team factor and perceived cooperation varied among departments (Sylvie, 1996; Lewis, 1997), and how teams were implemented because of management's request for quantity over quality (Endres, Schierhorn & Schierhorn, 1999). For example, Sylvie's (1996) survey of 70 Ohio newspaper editors investigated goals and departmental differences in newspaper interdepartmental relationships. Among the news, advertising and circulation departments, the team factor was ranked one of the lowest in comparison to factors related to circulation, news and advertising (p.234). The team factor was defined as the success of the organization as a whole; personnel reputation, net profit, and communication were not directly included. Sylvie found low perceived cooperation among the departments. A similar finding was made in a study by Lewis (1997), who investigated how practices in advertising, editorial and production differed in performance. This study also did not include the role of communication as a factor but measured the team variable for its use in developing solutions to newsroom problems and completion of work. The survey of editors and directors in advertising, editorial and

production departments found that performance was more likely to occur in the advertising than in the editorial or production departments.

One might think that the number of additional journalists involved would impact communication and the quality of the news story, but scholars surprisingly have not found negative effects, including the lack of communication among team members, journalists being unaware of their team responsibilities (Hansen, Neuzil & Ward, 1999) and the negative influence of management on the news product (Endres, Schierhorn & Schierhorn, 1999). For example, Hansen, Neuzil and Ward (1999) found that the team affects communication: Journalists spent more time in meetings to make decisions. They also found that journalists didn't have a clear idea of the leader, goals, and expectations (Hansen, Neuzil & Ward, 1999, pp.812-813). Endres, Schierhorn & Schierhorn's (1999) baseline survey about newspaper teams showed 37 percent of newspapers surveyed said they had a team for special projects or topics. Managers said sometimes they decided to use a team structure to increase quality and productivity. Regarding communication, the researchers found that 32 percent of teams said they rely on regular meetings and talking to coordinate work. The perceived communication between mid- and top management was about the same whether teams or traditional beats were used. Although more staff members said they felt they interacted more as a team, 32 percent of managing editors said they perceived better communication in teams compared to 64 percent who said perceived better communication could be attained for the traditional beat system (Endres, Schierhorn & Schierhorn, 1999).

These studies show a team of journalists working on a story can have issues in communicating and also can have confusion over who will do what tasks; these problems can impact the final news story. In sum, these three effects perspectives show that a team does not necessarily mean better communication. So challenges exist for newsroom teams and in the news production process. How communication works during the news production process might be suggested by examining groups to see how they might explain a culture that supports joint work among members in or out of groups.

The concept of group communication began with the work of Lewin during the 1930s and 1940s with the group dynamic as mentioned earlier in the section on the role of groups in organizations. Group communication scholarship since has used several perspectives, including relationships, tasks, influences, decision-making, socialization, technology use and adoption, and creative processes that play a role in groups in different contexts and situations, ranging from the family environment to the work organization. Therefore this field of group communication can help to explain how groups communicate in an organization.

As defined earlier in the chapter, organizational work groups are defined (Greenbaum & Query, 1999) “as three or more persons who perceive themselves to be a work group, interact somewhat regularly together over time, and are embedded within a network of interlocking tasks, roles, and relationships that often include interacting with other work groups or individuals within and/or outside the organization” (p.540). Specifically, organizational group communication scholarship can be sorted into four categories: input, process, output, and feedback (Greenbaum & Query, 1999). Within

these categories, we can identify task, members, structure and environment (McGrath & Altman, 1966; Rice, 1978; Bass, 1982; Greenbaum et al., 1988; Greenbaum & Query, 1999). These categories can help to identify and to explain how groups work together. In addition, these classification systems show how group interactions occur across time and the types of interaction that can ensue, thus showing how communication in a workgroup is a complex, ongoing process.

By tying the organizational group communication literature and journalism scholarship, we can connect communication in workgroups in the newsroom and a collective or individualistic culture. Using Hofstede's schema in the workplace, "Finally, individualism-collectivism values may partially determine such processes as the development of group norms and pressure for conformity and such outcomes as group cohesiveness and members' identification with a group" (Haslett & Ruebush, 1999, p. 127).

## **2.7 CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION IN THE NEWSROOM**

As mentioned in section 2.3 of empirical evidence of the theory, the schema of collectivism and individualism, as well as those of high- and low-context communication, has been identified as related and isomorphic. Cultures that are low-context have been determined to be connected to individualistic cultures and cultures that are high-context have been found to be connected to collectivistic cultures (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p.44). This logic leads us to understand that a culture in a workplace with members who communicate explicitly also is in a culture that focuses on the individual for their

own interests. Then, a culture in a workplace with members who communicate implicitly is a culture that focuses on the collective and the interests of the group. Thus, an online operation in a news organization can be considered a workplace with a culture that can be examined using these two schemas. However, this answers only one element about the culture of the online operation in how the members work and communicate. It is necessary to see another part of the culture that connects how the members work and communicate in the news production process (and their responsibility to be accurate and comprehensive in their work) because of their role as public servants and watchdogs of the government.

## **2.8 THE CONTENT: ACCURACY AND CONTEXT IN THE NEWSROOM**

Few scholars have examined online newsrooms for the ethical and the journalistic principles (Christians, 1998; Deuze & Yeshua, 2001; Zaragoza, 2002; Singer, 2003; Singer 2006), but cyberspace has created new questions, such as what are considered reliable sources when obtaining information from the Web, and dilemmas such as whether to assume a fake identity online for investigating an issue (Deuze & Yeshua, 2001, p.288). Additionally, traditional approaches on media ethics cannot be used in the online environment (Deuze & Yeshua, 2001; Christians, 1998). For example, Deuze and Yeshua's (2001) study of online journalists in the Netherlands examined journalists' opinions on commercial pressure, hyperlink usage, accuracy/credibility, sources, privacy, regulation and newsgathering method. The online journalists identified several new issues; many felt that they could make mistakes and quickly replace them online in real

time. Others didn't see problems in letting mistakes sit and correcting them later. And this demonstrates a greater problem in journalistic judgment and in responsibility to the news citizen because of the immediacy of the technology that diminishes the importance of being accurate when giving information or telling a story.

There are issues of immediacy and accuracy. Christians (1998) argued that new ways of thinking are needed for online journalism. "We need, instead, sophisticated social ethics to match the power of our instrumental era. Modern technology has introduced such novel scales and consequences that the framework of traditional ethics no longer addresses them" (Christians, 1998, p.68). Meaning that scales of efficiency (how much information to publish despite only having a portion) and consequences of speed (when to post and present the information received) create new situations regarding journalistic judgment and responsibility. Pavlik (1999) claimed that over the years technology has always influenced journalism. This technology may have helped the journalists work better or faster in terms of context, accuracy, and identifiable sources. But technology also may influence journalism negatively in making mistakes, inaccuracies or other issues easier to occur. For example, a news website can feature breaking news about a catastrophe and, with the immediacy of the Internet, the journalist can submit information to the site (such as the number of fatalities involved with the catastrophe). However, as the story develops, the number of fatalities either increase or decrease and, as such, the servers may or may not update the content as quickly - making the news website look incorrect or inaccurate if the news citizen visits the site in such moments as the story develops. Another example involves a journalist who obtains

information for a story and hyperlinks to a source within the story. Suppose that hyperlink later turns out to be a broken link or a webpage that is no longer relevant or which does not contain its original information. As a result, the journalist is not providing all the information or is providing inaccurate information to the news citizen as a result of this hyperlink error.

These ethical situations pose a greater challenge for journalists in the converged newsroom environment of multiple technologies, in particular. For example, Zaragoza (2002) identified newsroom issues regarding credibility as well as concerns that the portability of the computer made it easier to do less reporting. Another example (Singer, 2006) identified issues of accuracy and news coverage tone between converged newsrooms of print and television journalists. Singer (2006) identified that the print and television journalists took issue with each other when it came to speed and the level of urgency required with breaking news stories. She also found that the television and print journalists had problems with the type of news coverage they shared because the tone of the story would change with the medium (print or broadcast) in which the story appeared.

Defining whether a collaborative news production process contributes to or hinders journalistic principles (such as accuracy through verification; comprehensiveness through adding resources to a story) in the online news environment, may require identifying the ways in which the newsroom culture supports a collectivistic and individualistic schema as well as high-and low-context communication among journalists.

## 2.9 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

To sum the literature from section 2.4 and onward, we conclude the following: (1) an online newsroom reflects a form of organizational culture; the extent to whether the journalists work together or individually in this culture has shown mixed results. The literature reflects more of a focus on the journalist individually working in a hierarchical structure based on the routines and news production processes examined. However, we may be able to expand on this literature by looking at journalists working together in a more horizontal structure. (2) Communication in a workplace can be implicit or explicit, depending on the culture and if the work is done individually or together. The literature has shown that when journalists are put together, it's been in teams or as individuals in hierarchical management structures and the communication literature has shown inconsistent results regarding how this helps productivity. However, we may be able to expand on this literature by looking at journalists in a group structure and how communication works within the group. (3) The online newsroom culture will support an environment where journalists work together or individually to get the news posted to the website and this work can impact the accuracy and context of the news being posted. These findings help to set the foundation for the research questions presented in the next chapter.

The theoretical framework and literature review in this chapter justifies the following information we know in the academy: (1) Organizational cultures do exist and thus we can discover aspects of a culture in the newsroom also exists; (2) organization cultural theory can include the study of teams or groups in the workplace and thus we can

identify the use of teams and workgroups in the newsroom; (3) the extent of collaboration has shown inconsistent results among teams in comparison to the workgroup, thus we may conclude that the workgroup in the newsroom collaborates more than a team of journalists; (4) the organizational culture can be identified by the level of dependency (collectivism/individualism) that members in the organization have on each other, as well as the implicit and explicit (high/low-context) communication used by the members in the organization. Thus we can identify a similar schema among journalists in the newsroom and; (5) the newsroom culture can impact the collaborative work produced by the form of communication used and levels of dependency the journalists have on each other during news production that supports or hinders the levels of accuracy and context in the news posted to the website.

## **2.10 CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This section provides definitions of major concepts discussed in this chapter, theoretical statements that connect to linkages made in the literature, and the research questions used in this study. Specifically, the next section offers definitions for the concepts of the organizational workgroup, collaboration among the workgroup, the news production process, cultural schema of individualism and collectivism as well as high-and low-context communication, and journalistic principles. Following each concept, a theoretical statement that links the findings from the literature discussed in this chapter and shows how this connects to the study's research questions.

### **2.10.1 Organizational workgroup defined**

In this dissertation, journalists (editors, producers, designers, reporters) are analyzed as an organizational workgroup, defined as a set of three or more people working together on a task. This is similar to a definition given by Greenbaum and Query (1999) that best describes an organizational group of “three or more persons who perceive themselves to be a work group, interact somewhat regularly together over time, and are embedded within a network of interlocking tasks, roles, and relationships that often include interacting with other work groups or individuals within and/or outside the organization” (p.540). In this study, the group of journalists will be identified as online news workgroups. Online news workgroups can be defined as a set of three or more individuals who make a group with a common goal or task in the online newsroom.

*First Theoretical Statement:* In this chapter, it was identified within the field of organizational behavior that the workplace operates by individual work but also by groupwork (Lewin, 1931; Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger, 1941 in Ott, Parkes, & Simpson, 2003; Drucker, 1959; McGregor, 1960). By examining the workgroup in the organization, we can understand how members in an organization communicate and work together to complete their tasks and how this contributes to making a culture. A culture consisting of people, resources, artifacts, history, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions embedded in the organization also defines their system and structure. Within the culture of the newsroom, the literature has identified that the structure of teams holds inconsistent results including issues in communication and confusion over who does what task and how these problems can impact the final story (Sylvie, 1996; Lewis, 1997;

Hansen, Neuzil & Ward, 1998; Neuzil, Hansen & Ward, 1999; Endres, Schierhorn & Schierhorn, 1999; Thornton 2006). Such team issues challenge how the newsroom works efficiently and the news production process. How communication works and how newswork flows might be revealed by examining groups in the news organization. Despite the omission of the workgroup in the journalism scholarship, the structure of the workgroup has been identified in business management and organizational literature as to its importance in the organization and how it helps in the performance of tasks (Cartwright & Zander, 1953, 1960, 1968; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Therefore, in this dissertation, based on the two newsrooms that are part of this study, the following question is presented: *Research Question 1: What are the characteristics of an online news workgroup in the online newsroom?*

By describing the characteristics of the online news workgroup in the online newsroom, this study can help to identify how group members work and communicate together in this workplace in addition to describing a part of the organization's culture. Second, it can help in identifying whether forms of collaborative work exist in the online newsroom in these two case studies.

### **2.10.2 Collaboration defined**

The work between the members in the online news workgroup can be defined based on the collaboration they employ when posting news to the website. Collaboration can be defined as “to work together, especially in some literary or scientific undertaking,” (Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2002, p.118). Specifically,

collaboration in the organization has been defined by the presence of the characteristics of shared power, participative decision-making, is nonhierarchical, focuses on functions not roles, operates as an open system, recognition among staff of ongoing processes for feedback, evaluation and modification, and fosters interdependence (Kraus, 1984, pp.20-21). The use of the word “collaboration” has not been identified in much of the journalism scholarship (Chan, 2002; Bruns, 2005). However, Bruns uses the concept of collaborative publishing models to describe open-source, peer-to-peer journalism, and collaborative news websites as “news sites which largely rely on their users as information gatherers, editors, or commentators” (Bruns, 2005, p.28). Whereas Chan (2002) has used the concept of collaborative news networks to describe non-traditional news organizations (such as *Slashdot* ) that decentralize the news production process to include the reader, “collaborative news networks are a unique manifestation of online journalism in their reliance on a large, physically dispersed and anonymous body of site users to produce the nearly all-news content.” These two definitions are fairly similar in describing collaboration outside of the news organization and with the reader. Yet, these definitions only describe the collaboration that can occur outside of the news organization, instead of inside the newsroom.

This study operationalizes the concept of collaboration inside the news organization to define the process of activities - that the journalists in the online newsroom share - that has certain conditions. These properties are based on constructs created by Klein and Kozlowski (2000). The conditions for collaboration to occur can have particularly global, shared team, and configural team properties that contribute to an activity. The global properties “are relatively objective, descriptive, and easily observable

team characteristics. Global properties, such as team function, characterize the team as a whole” (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000, p.215). The properties are general in nature and do not reside in the characteristics of the members. Second, the shared team properties “originate in experiences, attitudes, perceptions, values, cognitions, or behaviors that are held in common by the members of a team. Examples of shared team properties include team cohesion, team norms, team climate, and team mental models” (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000, p.215). The properties are set by characteristics in the members, but must be common among the group in order to qualify; otherwise they would only be individual attributes and not a shared attribute among the group. Third, the configural team properties “capture the array, pattern, or variability of individual characteristics within a team....Examples include team interpersonal network density, team personality composition, and team age diversity” (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000, p.217). The properties are specific to the individual member, but when placed into the larger context of the whole group they represent a configural team characteristic.

Adopting this concept from Klein and Kozlowski (2000), this dissertation uses their definitions of global, shared and configural properties for describing group-level phenomenon (p.215). Thus, global properties of collaboration include the physical location of the group work, what kind of work is shared, the form of communication used among the group, and the virtual or online location and access where group work occurs. For example, at such a level, the condition of collaboration to occur in the online newsroom is achieved if the online journalists are all doing the same work in the same area of the same floor of the building versus in separate sections or separate floors of the same building. Shared team properties of collaboration include the time in which the

group work happens, if coworkers identify themselves as part of a group, team or other, and the usage of “I” or “we” in conversations. For example, at this level, the condition of collaboration to occur in the online newsroom is achieved if the online journalists share the same work schedule of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. of posting content to all the sections of the news website. Configural team properties of collaboration include the number of journalists who share similar characteristics of work experience (i.e. working for the same news organization or type for same number of years), education and training (i.e. attended the same or similar institution such as a state university), and their city and country of origin (i.e. originate from the same city or region, such as the Midwest). For example, at this level, the condition of collaboration to occur in the online newsroom is achieved if a group of online journalists all have similar individual career experiences that make it easier for them to understand and work with each other.

*Second Theoretical Statement:* In this chapter, the organizational and business management literature implied that collaboration can be achieved and can help an organization to perform better and efficiently (Deutsch 1949, 1968; Drucker, 1959; Kraus, 1984). However, collaboration can also cause more conflict as well as confusion and may not be as ideal for a team - but collaboration may be better for a workgroup (Cross, Martin & Weiss, 2006; Bryan, Matson & Weiss, 2007; Weiss & Hughes, 2005; Evans & Wolf, 2005; Gratton & Erickson, 2007). Thus, workgroups in the workplace of the news organization may work more collaboratively than a team. Therefore, in this dissertation, based on the three properties (global, shared and configural) of conditions that help collaboration to occur, the following question is presented: *Research Question 2: What form of collaboration is employed in the online newsroom?*

By examining the collaboration in the newsroom, this study can help to classify the forms of collaboration that exist in the workplace and show how the online news workgroup members work together in the news production process.

### **2.10.3 News production process defined**

Although the concept of collaboration has been operationalized above, the news production process also requires identification. The news production process has often been examined. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) identify five levels of influence: the ideological, extramedia, organization, media routines, and individual (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) on the news production process. Considering these influences, they easily adapt to journalism scholarship. In this dissertation, the news production process will be operationalized from the perspective of media routines: shared tasks among journalists that require interaction among the journalists as they go about their daily work. In this dissertation, the news production process is investigated by how the online journalists (editors, designers, producers, and reporters) move content (text, video, audio, photos, graphics, and multimedia) to the website as part of the news production process.

*Third Theoretical Statement:* In this chapter, organizational theories such as “classical,” “modern,” and “systems,” explored the various structural organizations, the processes and systems that they support and the products or outcomes produced (H. Munsterberg, 1913; M. Munsterberg, 1922; Taylor, 1911, Weber, 1922; Thompson, 1967; Kast & Rosenweig, 1972; Davis & Lawrence, 1977; Mintzberg 1979; Shafritz & Ott, 1987; Katz & Kahn, 1996). A newsroom also can fit within this typology of an organization that has its own structure, processes and systems. In fact, journalism

scholarship has examined the newsroom structure and identified it from a hierarchical, individualistic structure of the gatekeeper and assembly-line process (White, 1950; Geiber, 1956; Snider, 1967; Bantz, McCorkle & Baade, 1977; Gans, 1979). However, organizational “cultural” theory explores the ways in which the human relations or norms and behaviors of the individuals and workgroups in the organization influence the systems, structures, processes and outcomes of an organization (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1984; Schein, 1985; Sathe, 1985; Kilmann, Saxton, Serpa & Associates, 1985; Shafritz & Ott, 1987; Bolman & Deal, 1997; Schein, 2004). This organizational “cultural” approach may help explain the newsroom production process as a structure that requires cooperation of multiple individuals, resources and processes at the same time in which collaboration may be required among workgroups. The collaboration among workgroups has been identified in other types of organizations, as mentioned on the previous pages. Thus, the news production process may be tied to forms of collaboration in the news organization depending on whether the journalists work together as a group or individually. Therefore, the following question is presented as part of this study: *Research Question 3: What are the collaborative traits of the online news production process?*

By investigating the connections of collaboration between the online news workgroup and the news production process, this study can help to describe how the collaborative behavior of the workgroups influences the systems, processes, and outcomes of this particular organization and defines its culture.

#### **2.10.4 Cultural schema defined**

As discussed in the previous pages, the online news workgroup, the collaboration between members of the workgroup, and the news production process all contribute to establishing a form of culture in the news organization. Culture in an organization can be described using the schema of collectivism and individualism by Hofstede (1980). The notions of collectivism and individualism are based on a major multiple-country study conducted by Hofstede to identify cultural variability on four dimensions, including power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity. His study was based on survey data from a large multinational business organization in 40 countries conducted in 1968 and in 1972. The four dimensions were based on the theoretical reasoning and statistical analysis of more than 116,000 responses to a series of questions about values of the employees who worked at the large organization. For each dimension, he created an index to rank the scores of the responses by country. The higher the score on the index, the more likely that country reflected that particular dimension. If a country had a high score for the individualism dimension, it resembled an individualistic culture; if the country had a high score on the collectivism dimension, it resembled a collectivistic culture. For the individualism and collectivism dimension, a collectivistic culture supports the notion that “people belong to ingroups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty” whereas an individualistic culture supports the notion that “people are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family

only” (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, p.419). Thus, in a collectivistic culture, members look out for each other whereas in an individualistic culture, members look out for themselves.

Collectivism has an “emphasis on (a) the views, needs, and goals of the ingroup rather than of oneself; (b) social norms and duty defined by the ingroup rather than behavior to get pleasure; (c) beliefs shared with the ingroup rather than beliefs that distinguish self from ingroup; and (d) great readiness to cooperate with ingroup members” (Triandis, 1989, p.52). Individualism can be defined as “a belief that the individual is an end in himself, and as such ought to realize his ‘self’ and cultivate his own judgment, notwithstanding the weight of pervasive social pressures in the direction of conformity” (Gould & Kolb, 1964). In summary, Hofstede (1980) suggests that the collective culture has a focus on the group and the goals it can meet as a unit, versus an individualistic culture that focuses on personal goals and attainment.

*Fourth Theoretical Statement:* In this chapter, the literature showed that organizations do have cultures which consist of people, resources, artifacts, history, attitudes, beliefs and assumptions embedded in the organization that also define their system and structure. Based on the work of Hofstede (1980), the members in an organization will work together collectively as a group and/or on their own individually, based on the values, assumptions, beliefs and norms of the members in the organization. Organizational and business management literature established connections between workgroups, collective activity, and individualism and/or collectivism in the workplace (Earley, 1993; 1994; Moorman & Blakely, 1995; Wagner, 1995; Eby & Dobbins, 1997). A newsroom is an organization with its own culture and the members of the organization may or may not work together. Previous journalism scholarship has shown that the

culture of the newsroom has been examined from an individualistic, hierarchical structure based on the news production process of the newsroom (White, 1950; Geiber, 1956; Snider, 1967; Bantz, McCorkle & Baade, 1977; Gans, 1979). However, the online newsroom may show a different structure of newsrooms of the past – it has multiple resources, people, and processes that may require group work and collaboration as discussed in previous pages of this chapter. Thus a collectivistic culture, versus an individualistic culture, may be more applicable within the culture of the online newsroom. Thus, the following question is presented as part of this study: *Research Question 4a: To what degree is the online newsroom a collectivistic or individualistic culture?* Examining whether the online journalists are independent or interdependent of each other as a workgroup can provide information as to what kind of culture exists in these two newsrooms, as well as provide information as to whether this culture is more likely to support a collaborative news production process.

In addition to understanding the culture of the online newsroom, the form of communication also is crucial to understanding how the online news workgroups work together on the website. As Hofstede (1980) found that cultures exist in an organization from a particular schema, Hall (1976) also found that cultures exist in an organization based on how members communicate with each other, whether implicitly or explicitly. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Hall identified a high-context communication culture as where “most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message” whereas low-context communication is “the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code” (Hall, 1976, p.79). In this chapter, the literature identified a linkage

between Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1980) says that cultures that are collectivistic can be high-context and cultures that are individualistic can be low-context (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Gudykunst, Mastumoto, et.al, 1996; Kim, 1994; Singelis & Brown, 1995). Particularly, studies identified (Singelis & Brown, 1995; Gudykunst, Mastumoto, et.al, 1996) that when people were dependent on each other, they were more likely to communicate implicitly rather than explicitly and these forms of communication helped the group to work cohesively. Thus, when we consider the online newsroom and the workgroup, the collaborative work required to get the job done efficiently may require implicit communication among the journalists.

*Fourth Theoretical Statement (part 2):* Hall suggests that high-context culture is indirect communication among individuals, whereas low-context culture is direct communication among individuals in an organization. Journalism scholarship has shown when journalists do work together that work has been in teams, not in groups. The studies show that teams of journalists working on stories do have issues in communicating (Neuzil, Hansen & Ward, 1999; Hansen, Neuzil & Ward, 1999; Endres, Schierhorn & Schierhorn, 1999). However, group communication among journalists may show a different result. Therefore, if we consider the online newsroom within an online news workgroup structure, we may be able to identify the forms of communication that occur within this culture. Therefore, the following question is presented as part of this study:

*Research Question 4b: To what degree is the online newsroom a low-or high- context communication culture?*

By examining the forms of communication among the workgroups of journalists in the online newsroom, this study can assist in identifying whether forms of direct or

indirect communication facilitate in a collaborative news production process. In addition, this question can help to describe another part of the organizational culture of these two cases.

### **2.10.5 Journalistic principles defined**

The previous pages have documented the definitions of culture and communication. Workplace communication and culture in turn, can impact the content that online journalists produce. That content includes text, video, audio, flash interactives and graphics. Of particular concerns here are the journalistic principles proposed by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) of verification and comprehensiveness. Verification is defined as a way “to prove to be true by demonstration, evidence, etc., confirm” (Webster’s New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2002, p.704). Thus, in this dissertation, verification is clarifying and confirming the information the journalists receive before posting it online. Comprehensiveness can be defined as “wide in scope; inclusive” (Webster’s New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2002, p.126). In this dissertation, comprehensiveness means compiling more information in an effort to provide this information to the news citizen. An online story can include additional stories, multimedia, hyperlinks or audience-generated content such as comments, forum discussions, voting polls or other methods.

*Fifth Theoretical Statement:* In this chapter, we have identified how culture and communication are important in the organization and how it operates. The newsroom is an organization with a culture and a form of communication. We also have identified that journalists in the newsroom may or may not work together during the news production

process depending on the culture of the workplace. Within the news organization, there is a process of gathering and presenting the news. As part of the news production process, the principles of accuracy and context can impact the online news production process by how much information is correct and is sufficient for the news citizen. Journalism as a profession has a responsibility to be accurate and comprehensive in its work because of journalists' role as public servants and watchdogs of the government. In this chapter, the literature revealed that online newsrooms and journalists face new ethical questions and issues with the inception of the Web. These ethical questions and issues can include but are not limited to the determination of a reliable source and when to post corrections to inaccurate information online (Christians, 1998; Deuze & Yeshua, 2001). The problem of journalistic judgment and responsibility to the news citizen may be blurred because of the immediacy of the technology that diminishes the importance of being accurate and contextual when giving information or telling a story. In the online newsroom, multiple resources, people and processes are required to post the news on the site. This collaborative news production process can help make the news accurate and comprehensive when there are multiple people and resources involved that can help to maintain the needed checks and balances to keeping the story accurate. The literature has shown that journalists have operated according to policies and routines (Breed, 1955; Matejko, 1967; Soloski, 1989) in the newsroom where journalistic principles and guidelines have been upheld – but supported by motivations and interests that can be individualistic. The journalistic routines may have become so embedded in the workplace that they are implicit and we neglect to see how they may dominate organizational culture without considering other work structures and processes.

Thus, the journalistic principles and guidelines of the profession may be upheld as well in a collectivistic culture, where collaborative efforts of several members of the organization can identify ethical errors of judgment (i.e. incorrect information posted to a story) or help identify more information and context for the news citizen for a story (i.e. additional related stories or online map) sooner than if the work was done by only one journalist. Thus, the following question is presented to identify how these principles are utilized in the news production process in the two newsrooms in this study: *Research Question 5: Do the news routines of the online news workgroups support or interfere with the journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness?*

By examining this question, the organizational culture of these two newsrooms can reveal how the collaborative efforts of the workgroup help or hinder journalistic principles in the newsroom. Second, this question can help to demonstrate how collective journalistic judgment and responsibility in these two cases can influence the structures, the processes and the outcomes of the news presented for public consumption.

In summary, these five theoretical statements and their research questions identify how two online newsrooms operate, how the journalists work in this environment (as a collective or individually), how they communicate (implicitly or explicitly), how they collaborate with each other, and how this collaboration can help facilitate the needed steps to make the news content accurate and comprehensive that they post on the Website. The next chapter will address the methodology used in this research.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

To understand the nature of collaborative production that occurs in the online newsroom at *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte*, an ethnographic approach was used. This cross-national, comparative method allows the researcher to show similarities and differences in the respective cultures. This is important to show whether the phenomena being observed can be due to national or professional culture differences. This type of research occurs when “comparisons are made across two or more geographically or historically (spatially or temporally) defined systems, the phenomena of scholarly interest which are embedded in a set of interrelations that are relatively coherent, patterned, comprehensive, distinct, and bounded” (Blumer, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992, p.7). The research questions investigated through the ethnographic approach consist of the following:

1. What are the characteristics of an online news workgroup in the online newsroom?
2. What form of collaboration is employed in the online newsroom?
3. What are the collaborative traits of the online news production process?
4. To what degree is the online newsroom a collectivistic or individualistic culture?  
A low-or high-context communication culture?
5. Do the news routines of the online news workgroups support or interfere with the journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness?

Each question is best answered by conducting an ethnographic study. These research questions cannot be answered through the methods of experimentation, survey or content analyses alone. First, an experiment is a method that allows the researcher to isolate phenomena in a controlled setting to see if it is likely it could occur by chance when other variables are accounted for. Its strength is in its ability to show causation depending on the experiment. Its weakness is the inability to observe the natural studied environment naturally. In understanding the newsroom and its culture, an experiment is contradictory to understanding the natural setting of the news organization because of the controls it requires. Second, a survey allows for the researcher to sample a large population on a particular topic that may not be readily observable. Its weakness is that it only presents perceptions versus actual realities or behaviors observed of particular individuals in the sample. In understanding the newsroom and its culture, a survey would only show the perceptions and would not document the actual behaviors and realities. Third, a content analysis has its strengths in showing patterns and trends in messages presented in a specific form like a newspaper or magazine. However, its weakness lies in that it is only a reflection of the ways in which the codebook was formulated to measure what types of content were analyzed. It does not help to document the observed actions and realities of a newsroom and its culture.

However, using an ethnographic approach - such as participant observation - allows the researcher to explore phenomena in their natural setting to see how they occur and what influences impact them naturally. It allows the researcher to see the interactions, the individuals, the space, the artifacts and the resources together with the

phenomena and how these aspects influence each other and the phenomena. Thus, this ethnographic method allows the researcher to observe the realities of the newsroom and its culture. Thus, this study uses observations, interviews, and documentation. Before explaining these three components, it's necessary to define ethnography and case studies.

This research uses a cultural definition of ethnography that is “the art and science of describing a group or culture” (Fetterman, 1989, p.11) because it focuses more on the aim of ethnography versus its role as a qualitative method. Sociologists argue that ethnography is more than just the study of cultural knowledge, patterns in social interaction and studies of societies. It requires the researcher to act and to reflect on one's involvement with the phenomena examined (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, pp.1-25). Lindlof and Taylor have a different definition of ethnography that focuses on, “describing and interpreting observed relationships between social practices and the systems of meaning in particular cultural milieu” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.16). While others focus on ethnography as a method, sociologist John Brewer, defines ethnography as “the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally” (Brewer, 2000, p.10). Earl Babbie describes ethnography as “a study that focuses on detailed and accurate description rather than explanation (Babbie, 2001, p.281). In comparison, Fetterman's approach focuses on the culture versus the researcher or the method, as other scholars have defined it. “Ethnographers must wander through a multicultural wilderness, learning

to see the world through the eyes of people from all walks of life” (Fetterman, 1989, p.137). Thus, Fetterman’s approach to ethnography helps to explain how the research questions in this study were answered from this methodological perspective.

This ethnography investigates the culture of journalists and their communication in the newsroom and the consequences of this on the online product. This micro approach identifies the journalists in the news-editorial group as the social unit that is part of a larger institution, the news organization. This approach allows the researcher to see parts of the newsroom she could not normally view or have access to such as their interactions, work and routines in their workplace. For example she is able to see how often the journalist meets with the designer and producer on a Flash news package. She is also able to observe the nonverbal cues in the newsroom of rolling eyes or smiles in the daily budget meeting when the editor makes a decision on a breaking news story and how this work will impact their workflow for the day.

As part of the ethnographic approach, the two newspapers serve as case studies. A case study in ethnography is “ characterized by researchers spending extended time on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, and revising descriptions and meanings of what is going on” (Stake, 2005, p.450). Others in the social sciences, such as Babbie (2001), categorize the case study as a separate research paradigm from ethnography, its purpose mainly being description, explanation or theory-building. However, Babbie’s definition omits what Stake mentions above -the greater meaning of capturing and reflecting on the phenomena observed and how the meaning transforms for the researcher during his or her documentation of this phenomena and how this in the end contributes to the way the phenomena is understood and

analyzed. Brewer (2000) has a similar perspective to Stake, that, “Case studies can address the micro situation of a single person in everyday life or the macro situation of a nation state in the global world. Case studies are distinguished, therefore, by the focus on the instance of the phenomenon, not by the method used to study it” (Brewer, 2000, p.76). Thus, this project uses the definition of the case study as the form of going in-depth into a specific phenomenon that is within the ethnographic method. There are three main types of case studies: exploratory, descriptive or explanatory (Yin, 2003). The exploratory format allows the researcher to enter a situation and identify the phenomenon that arises naturally without a preconceived idea of what they want to identify or observe while the explanatory format allows the researcher to see how phenomenon X causes phenomenon Y in the situation observed. These two formats are not relevant to the research questions here, as the purpose is to describe and to document the communication and culture of the online newsroom. In this research, the case studies are descriptive in that they explain the phenomenon within its context (Yin, 2003, p.5). Using two comparable case studies, instead of one, presents an advantage. “For instance, analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases, as with two experiments, will be more powerful than those coming from a single case (or single experiment) alone” (Yin, 2003, p. 135). Thus, this study has more information to provide on the collaborative news production process by including findings from two newsrooms instead of only one. However, case studies only represent the case and not a population or a sample. The findings in this study cannot be generalized to other newsrooms, but can provide context and complexity for further investigation and research (Stake, 2005). The context and complexity can help to explain the particular phenomena in these newsrooms (i.e. forms

of communication – direct or indirect) that can contribute to other cases studies of newsrooms or can help to lead researchers in the development of their hypotheses or research questions for other types of newsroom research.

### **3.1 SELECTION OF CASE STUDIES**

To qualify as a case for this research, the researcher identified a purposive sample of newspapers. A purposive sample is a recommended method for field researchers seeking special or exemplar cases (Babbie, 2001; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). An exemplar case can be considered, “a part of project’s data that is shaped and used to advance an argument” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.234). The newspapers selected were *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte*. These newspapers are exemplars for several reasons.

Table 3.1 Comparing the newspapers

	<i>El Norte</i>	<i>The Chicago Tribune</i>
<b>Parent company</b>	Private	Private
<b>Online staff</b>	200 (Integrated with print)	30 (not integrated with print)
<b>Technologies implemented in newsroom</b>	Electronic library, personal computers for staff; Financial news service launched online in the early 1990s for subscribers; One of the first online newspapers in Mexico.	First color photo of breaking news in 1939, Implementing teletex in 1984 and then audiotex, Launching the first Chicago all-news 24 hour cable channel in 1993, and in 2002 introducing “collating” in news production process, Newspaper content went online in 1992 via America Online and one of the first newspapers online in 1996.
<b>Journalistic awards received</b>	Maria Moors Cabot Award 1962; Mergenthaler Award in 1963, 1976	24 Pulitzers; 9 Eppy awards, 13 Digital Edge Awards
<b>Geography</b>	Nuevo Leon, México;	Chicago, Illinois;
<b>Industry</b>	Industries: iron, steel, cement, glass, beverages, coal, petroleum, and technology.  Major rail and highway hub of Northeast Mexico.	Industries: iron, steel, meatpacking, and electronics.  Major rail and highway hub of the Midwest.
<b>Internet users by Country</b>	18.622 million (2005 est.) (Mexico, 2007)	205.327 million (2005 est.) (United States, 2007)
<b>City population</b>	Monterrey: 1,133,800 (2006 estimate). Third most populous city in Mexico.	Chicago: 2,869,121 (2003 estimate). Third most populous city in the United States.
<b>Literacy rate</b>	91% total population	99% total population
<b>Newspaper Competition</b>	<i>El Provenir</i> and <i>Milenio</i>	<i>Chicago Sun-Times</i>

Note: Information in the above table is from the following sources (Mexico, 2007; United States, 2007; INEGI, 2006; “Monterrey, Mexico,” 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2003; “Chicago, Illinois,” 2005)

The researcher decided to select these two newspapers because she wanted papers located in cities that shared similar characteristics based on their geography, representative industries in their cities, and their literacy rate. She also wanted to select newspapers based on the form of journalism they practice and their use of technology in newsroom production. In addition, the two newspapers had to be part of prominent news organizations in the world (Reforma Group for *El Norte*; Tribune Company for *The Chicago Tribune*); the first news organizations to go on the Web in their respective countries and to have received several accolades and awards (see table above). More importantly, these news organizations also reflect a dedication to the preservation of journalism and its principles. These criteria were selected for these newspapers because they allow the researcher to compare the two cases on several common attributes without having too much variation that could skew the results from being valid. For example, if the two cases were from different media systems (democratic versus communist) or from different kinds of news organizations (Pulitzer-prize winning newspaper and mediocre newspaper), the ability to compare and contrast the cultures of the newsrooms would make the analysis a mute point because of the variation of factors and influences involved.

As for the reason for selecting these newspapers, they are not only the best news organizations in their local/regional areas but also internationally in journalism because of their ability to innovate and adapt to a dynamic media landscape. These newsrooms are transforming the field because of their innovative and unique approaches to journalism that is observable in the websites they create and how they produce the content for the sites. These two newspapers are exemplars of the transformation in

journalists' work in the news organization and serve as two cases to help explain the organizational culture of these particular online newsrooms.

Aside from the similarities, these two online newsrooms do have their differences. There are three clear differences between them. One of the first differences is the location and integration of the online and print operation. At the time of this study, *The Chicago Tribune* had its online operation located in the newsroom of the print operation but they remained separate entities from each other and not integrated. On the other hand, *El Norte* had its online operation located and integrated within the different sections of the print operation. For example, the online editors for each section (i.e. business, sports, features) were located in the same area with the print operation for that section. This location and integration between these two online newsrooms does show a difference in how the online operation collaborates within their operation as well as with their print counterpart on daily tasks.

The next difference between these two online newsrooms is how their national culture influences their organizational culture. Each online newsroom is located within its own respective state and country (Illinois, United States; Nuevo Leon, Mexico). These national cultures are apparent in the organizational culture through the behaviors, form of communication and language, values, norms, and beliefs that are embedded in the organization. For example, these can be observed by how the journalists interact and greet each other to how they make decisions daily in the newsroom.

The third difference between these two online newsrooms is the level of security and protection given to the journalists. Based on the history of the threats and dangers against journalists in Mexico and Latin America, this has influenced the level of

protection that the journalists have at *El Norte*. This is apparent in the tight levels of security that are apparent upon entrance in the building to walking the corridors where security cameras and guards are very common. For example, name placards are not found in the building to help protect their identity and if a story is published that may put a journalist at danger, their byline may be removed from the story. At *The Chicago Tribune*, security guards and guarded entrances are normal. However, the journalists in the United States press system have not experienced the level of threats and dangers as journalists in other countries. For example, name placards and identification cards are common and required at *The Chicago Tribune*. Everyone is aware who is who in the building. Security guards are at the entrances but rarely are they found to walk around the building in the same manner as they do at *El Norte*. There are the three major differences between these two online newsrooms.

The researcher's personal experience also contributed to the selection of these two newspapers. In 1996, the researcher was invited to work with the online staff of *The Chicago Tribune* to help program the website before its launch in March. The researcher then was invited back for three months in 1996 and again in 1997 to work in helping in several areas of the operation including writing and producing content for the site. For *El Norte*, knowing the online editor from academia helped the researcher in gaining access into the newsroom. These experiences helped her to establish rapport early with both newsrooms and to have additional background knowledge of both newspapers that an outsider may not have had. Details about each newspaper follows.



Illustration 3.1: Chicagotribune.com Homepage

### 3.1.1 ChicagoTribune.com (Chicago, Illinois)

*The Chicago Tribune* is part of the parent media company, Tribune Company. The Tribune Company owns 11 metro 7-day newspapers and 23 broadcast stations. As a private company, it has 20,000 employees and operating revenues of \$5.5 billion as of 2006. However, recent events document that it has gone private because of its recent purchase by real estate investor, Samuel Zell (Oneal, 2007). *The Chicago Tribune* newspaper began publishing June 10, 1847, and its online operation, Chicagotribune.com launched on March 14, 1996. The print newspaper has a daily readership of 1.8 million and the website has 2.4 million visitors a month. There are more than 600 journalists working for the print newspaper and 30 who work separately for the online operation (This includes news editorial, sports, entertainment, advertising/marketing group, and senior management. This format of the online operation working separate from the print operation is a common format in most U.S. newsrooms). For example, the *Washington*

*Post* has staff located in different buildings and cities for the online and print operations. *The New York Times* also practiced the same format of having staff in different buildings until recently when it began to have its online and print staff in the same building. The format of integrated staffs in U.S. newspapers is a slowly developing trend. *The Chicago Tribune* has won several journalistic awards, including 24 Pulitzers. Its online operation has won several awards, including 13 Digital Edge Awards (an annual award given by the Newspaper Association of America that recognizes news sites according to certain criteria in creativity and innovation; they most recently were awarded in 2007 for the most innovative multimedia storytelling) in addition to nine Eppy awards (an annual award given by Editor & Publisher and MediaWeek for honoring the best websites in radio, television, magazine and newspaper) for the online category. *The Chicago Tribune* and the Tribune Company have a history of being early adopters of technology. Over the years, they have implemented several technologies including printing the first color photo of breaking news in 1939, using Teletex in 1984 and then audiotex, launching the first Chicago all-news 24 hour cable channel in 1993, and in 2002 introducing “collating” (which is a way of assembling insert ads into a wrapped package for the news consumer) as part of the production process, one of two newspapers in the United States to do so. The newspaper launched a portion of its newspaper content online on America Online in 1992 called Chicago Online. In 1996, it became one of the first online newspapers on the Web in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chicago Tribune Company (2006). Our History. Retrieved March 2007, from, <http://chicagotribune.com/about/custom/company/history/>; Meet the Press (2007, January). *Chicago Magazine*, p.47.; Fitzgerald, M. (1997, February 8). Beyond Funny Pages. Editor & Publisher, (130)6, p.28.; Fitzgerald, M. (1996, March 30). Chicago Tribune up on the Web. *Editor & Publisher*, (129)13, p.28.; Chi Trib turns online profit (1996, February 24). *Editor & Publisher*, (129) 8, p.38.; ChicagoTribune.com (n.d.) E-mail the staff of the Chicago Tribune. Retrieved April 2007, from, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/services/site/chi-newspaperemail.0,1803151.htmlstory?coll=chi-contactblurbs->

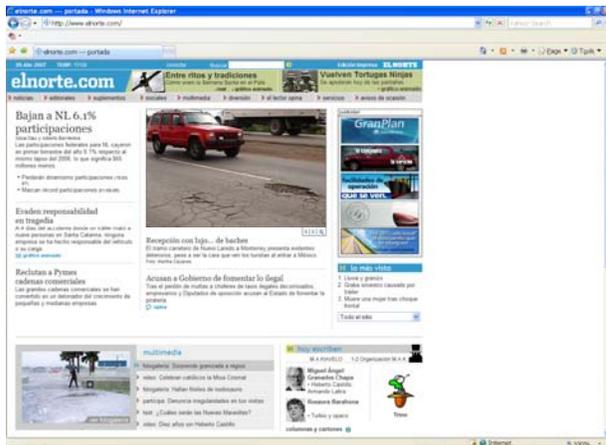


Illustration 3.2: ElNorte.com Homepage

### 3.1.2 ElNorte.com (Monterrey, Nuevo Leon State, Mexico)

*El Norte* (which means “The North”), is part of the parent media company, Reforma Group. The Reforma Group, a private company in Mexico with more than 700 employees, owns *El Norte* and three other newspapers (*Reforma*, *Mural*, *Palabra*) and is run by the Alejandro Junco de la Vega family. *El Norte* newspaper began publishing on September 15, 1938, and its online operation, ElNorte.com, started experimenting with delivering news online in 1996. The daily print newspaper circulation is 150,000 and its online operation has 51,253 active registered users with an average of 34,925,874 monthly pageviews (Online director, personal communication, March 2008). The print newspaper and online operation combined to form a staff of 200 (Information about the integration of staffs at other Mexican news organizations is not readily available, as many

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fea; ChicagoTribune.com (n.d.) Contact the chicagotribune.com staff. Retrieved April 2007, from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/services/newspaper/chi-onlineemail.0.3438167.htmlstory?coll=chi-navrailservices-nav>.

are privately owned. In general, it can be said that resources are few in many Mexican newsrooms and the integrated model works best from the standpoint of production and efficiency. However, this is an assumption on part of the researcher and may not reflect the complete picture of journalism practices in all Mexican newsrooms). *El Norte* has won several journalistic awards including Maria Moors Cabot Award (annual award for journalists who cover the Southern hemisphere and demonstrate a commitment to freedom of the press in their work administered by the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism) in 1962 and the Mergenthaler Award (award given to Latin America media comparable to the Pulitzer in the United States) in 1963 and 1976 (Zaragoza, 2002; “Who we are,” n.d.; A.J., personal communication, 2006).

*El Norte* also has a history of being an early adopter of technology. Over the years, it has implemented several technologies, including developing an electronic library and personal computers for the staff beginning in 1984. In 1996, ElNorte.com was launched, becoming one of the first online newspapers on the Web in Mexico. By 2000, the Reforma group launched websites of their three other newspapers (*Reforma*, *Mural* and *Palabra*) (Lawson, 2002; “Who we are,” n.d.).

The profiles given and the comparison in Table 3.1 demonstrate the similarities and differences between these two operations. Just to reiterate, the newspapers are located in the third most populous cities of their respective countries, they are in cities with similar industries (i.e. steel, iron), and they have a similar literacy rate among the population. Also, because of the form of journalism they practice, their early adoption of technology in their operations, and their dedication to good journalism that is recognized by their peers in the industry via special journalistic awards and accolades, these two

newsrooms have a fair amount of shared characteristics and differences to make this cross-national study effective in showing the extent of collaboration and how the journalistic principles are practiced in each newsroom.

### **3.2 ACCESS TO THE FIELDSITES**

Once the researcher identified the two cases, she obtained permission to visit by contacting the online editors at both newsrooms months in advance. The editors at both locations gave the researcher an open schedule of when and how often to visit, access to internal systems and documentation, and access to meetings. Her experience and rapport with the online editor at *The Chicago Tribune* was an advantage for her in gaining access into the newsroom. The researcher was invited to work with the online staff before its launch in March 1996 to help program the website. The researcher was then invited back for three months later in 1996 and again in 1997 to work with the online staff. During this period, she produced and assisted with content for the site. The researcher's experience in professionally knowing the online editor of *El Norte* aided the researcher with gaining access into the newsroom, as she was able to build a rapport with the editor over time and ask about the possibility of a newsroom visit.

### **3.3 OBJECT OF STUDY**

It is necessary to state what will be studied in this dissertation because it gives direction, clarification to the phenomena being analyzed, and helps to explain how certain terms are applied in this study. First, online journalism can be considered a different form

of journalism from radio, television and print. Negroponte in 1995 thought of the electronic newspaper in scientific terms composed of bits (a basic unit of storage and communication in computing that takes a value of 0 or 1) and as the intermediary between the audience and the news organization. “The interface solution is likely to call upon mankind’s years of experience with headlining and layout, typographic landmarks, images, and a host of techniques to assist browsing” (Negroponte, 1995, pp.152-153). Some have defined online journalism in less-scientific terms by its characteristics in how online news is nonlinear, immediate, interactive, and a tool to disseminate information (Ward 2002; Foust, 2005). Whereas others have come to define online news as “emerging media,” according to Boczkowski: “It (online journalism) is that new media emerge by merging existing social and material infrastructures with novel technical capabilities, a process that also unfolds in relation to broader contextual trends” (Boczkowski, 2005, p.4). The most applicable definition of online journalism is that by Cardoso (2006), who defines online journalism by the way multiple media are incorporated with visuals, text, multimedia, interactivity and the participation with the audience. “The journalist makes decisions as to the most appropriate format for a given topic – should it be the written format with the sound, whether or not images are to be used and whether or not those images should be animated. If he uses interactivity, the journalist has to manage the possibilities and spaces for the audience to write and interact. If he uses hypertextuality, he has to consider the forms of linking his article to others, in the form of archives or other contributions via links” (Cardoso, 2006, p.215). Thus, Cardoso’s definition explains a shared relationship between the journalist, the

medium and the audience and is the most complete representation of how to document online journalism in this project.

In the online newsroom there are journalists. These journalists include editors, designers, producers and reporters. In this dissertation, the journalists are analyzed as an organizational workgroup. An organizational workgroup can be defined as a set of three or more people who are working together on a task for completion. This is similar to a definition given by Greenbaum and Query (1999) that best describes an organizational group of “three or more persons who perceive themselves to be a work group, interact somewhat regularly together over time, and are embedded within a network of interlocking tasks, roles, and relationships that often include interacting with other work groups or individuals within and/or outside the organization” (p.540). In this study, the group of journalists will be identified as online news workgroups. Online news workgroups can be identified as a set of three or more individuals that produce news content for the website.

The focus of this study is collaboration and its relationship to online content. Collaboration can be defined as “to work together, especially in some literary or scientific undertaking,” (Webster’s New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2002, p.118). The use of the word collaboration, as yet, does not occur very frequently in journalism scholarship (Chan, 2002; Bruns, 2005). However, Bruns uses the concept of collaborative publishing models to describe open-source, peer-to-peer journalism, and collaborative news websites as “news sites which largely rely on their users as information gatherers, editors, or commentators” (Bruns, 2005, p.28). Whereas Chan (2002) has used the concept of collaborative news networks to describe non-traditional news organizations such as

*Slashdot* that decentralize the news production process to include the reader, “collaborative news networks are a unique manifestation of online journalism in their reliance on a large, physically dispersed and anonymous body of site users to produce the nearly all news content.” These two definitions are fairly similar in describing collaboration outside of the news organization and with the reader. This dissertation will focus on the collaboration within the news organizations among the online news workgroup. As mentioned earlier by Kraus (1984), a collaborative workplace utilizes shared power, participative decision-making, is nonhierarchical, focuses on functions not roles, operates as an open system, recognizes ongoing processes for feedback, evaluation and modification, and fosters interdependence (pp.20-21). Thus, the study’s identifies collaborative news production as the process of activities that journalists in the online newsroom that have global, shared and configural conditions that make collaboration likely to occur. These conditions are addressed next.

In this dissertation, the daily news production activities in the online newsroom can be considered collaborative. For example, a collaborative newsroom can be described when certain global, shared and individual conditions exist in the work environment. Adopting a concept from Klein and Kozlowski (2000), this dissertation uses their constructs of global, shared and configural properties for describing group level phenomenon (p.215). Klein and Kozlowski (2000) propose the three constructs to aid researchers when they perform multilevel theoretical research between individuals and groups. Since this dissertation focuses on multiple levels of collaboration among groups of journalists and how they work with each other, with news production processes and content, the researcher felt this approach to analyzing the field site might help in the

categorization of collaboration. Thus, the condition of global properties in the newsroom that need to exist for collaboration to occur include the physical location of the group work (i.e. same cubicle area of the same floor), what kind of work is shared (i.e. all are updating the same webpages on the site), the form of communication used among the group (i.e. use of email or instant messenger), and the location and access where group work occurs (i.e. type of content management system used). For example, at this level, successful collaboration in the online newsroom is possible if the condition exists if the online journalists all are working in the same area of the same floor of the building versus in separate sections or separate floors of the same building. As for the condition of shared properties in the newsroom that need to exist for collaboration to occur include the time in which the group work happens (i.e. everyone starts at 6 a.m.), if coworkers identify themselves as part of a group, team or other (i.e. they identify themselves as a team), and the usage of “I” or “We” in conversations (i.e. “I am uploading this graphic to the page”). For example at this level, collaboration in the online newsroom is achieved if the condition exists for the online journalists to share the same work schedule of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. of posting content to all the sections of the news website. Also, the condition of configural properties in the newsroom that need to exist for collaboration to occur include the number of journalists who share similar characteristics of work experience (i.e. they all work for the print newspaper or other print newspapers previously), education and training (i.e. they all have an undergraduate education from an institution in the Midwest section of the United States), and their city and country of origin (i.e. they are all from the Midwest section of the United States or from the central part of Mexico). For example at this level, collaboration in the online newsroom is facilitated if the condition exists for a

group of the online journalists to have similar individual career experiences that may help to contribute to their ability to understand and work with each other.

With these conditions of collaboration described, the next portion defines the online news production process. In the newsroom, the hierarchy of influences - such as ideological, extramedia, organization, media routines, individual (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) all play a role within the news production process. This project closely examines the media routines level. These media routines are common among the journalists and the extent to which these routines are communicated among the staff in the day-to-day production demonstrates how collaboration may play a role or not in the newsrooms examined. The researcher investigates how the online journalists (editors, designers, producers, and reporters) move content (text, video, audio, photos, graphics, and multimedia) to the website as part of the news production process.

Finally, the journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness also are placed within their context in this dissertation. Verification is defined as a way “to prove to be true by demonstration, evidence, etc., confirm” (Webster’s New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2002, p.704). Thus, in this dissertation, verification means clarifying and confirming the information the journalists receive before posting it to the website. Comprehensiveness can be defined as “wide in scope; inclusive” (Webster’s New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2002, p.126). In this dissertation, comprehensiveness is compiling more information in an effort to provide this information to the news citizen. This means that the online journalists may include with a single story: additional stories, multimedia, and hyperlinks. Or they may seek audience participation through the use of posting comments, forum discussions, voting polls, or other methods.

### 3.4 OBSERVATION

For this study, the researcher chose to play the role of participant-as-observer (See Gold, 1958, in Adler & Adler, 1995, p. 379). Participant observation allows the researcher to record people and their actions discreetly where the method “combines participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data” (Fetterman, 1989, p.45). During her observations, the researcher noted the explicit and implicit. Explicit observations ranged from notes about the appearance of the building, the office space, the furnishings, and the places where people go for lunch. She also observed the implicit, such as body language, the ways the staff interacted over the phone, or by each other’s desks, how they greeted each other in the mornings and what meanings that could have. The observation location at *The Chicago Tribune* was in the news-editorial section and the researcher sat at whatever cubicle available at the time. This gave her a chance to view the newsroom from a staff perspective. At the *El Norte* newsroom, the observation location also was at a computer desk in the news-editorial area of the newsroom, enabling her close access to the newsroom activities and to feel like a part of the staff.

During observations, the researcher first and foremost held the role of observer. She used a strategy of the active listener in paying attention, taking notes, and listening to all that transpired. Her ability to take this active-listener role allowed her to ask follow-up questions about details that closely tied to the observations she made. Depending on circumstances, the researcher also had the flexibility to participate in the surrounding

environment. In some situations, she did assist the staff in news production. By providing this support, it contributed to the rapport she built with the staff at both newsrooms.

### **3.5 RAPPORT**

For *The Chicago Tribune*, the researcher established a rapport (i.e. spending time with journalists watching them work, going to meals with them or getting a coffee, having general conversations with them, and attending company meetings with them) with the staff in the first two weeks. This was established through her professional relationship with the online editor. The online editor publicly showed his trust in the researcher and this helped his staff to trust her. By the second week, the staff invited her to meals, engaged her in private conversations, and greeted her when she entered the office. While at *El Norte*, the researcher also established a rapport (i.e. spending time with journalists watching them work, going to meals with them or getting a coffee, having general conversations with them, and attending company meetings with them) with the staff in the first two weeks. By this time, the staff began to openly invite her to meals, to engage in private conversations and to share information with her about the news organization.

### **3.6 TIMING**

The researcher spent 352 hours in both newsrooms. She spent 169 hours in the newsroom in Chicago and 183 hours in the newsroom in Mexico across a four-month timeframe. The length of time spent has varied in studies on online newsrooms. Some have made visits stretching four to six months (Boczkowski, 2005) while others have

done 15 days (Domingo, 2006) and others have made visits for just a week (Singer, 2006).

Considering previous studies, the researcher decided that 160 hours on average for each spread across four months would be a sufficient amount of time to capture the routines of the two newsrooms. In order to capture routines, the researcher visited each newsroom for 10 to 15 days at a time. To give the researcher time to get observations and interview notes transcribed and analyzed, she separated each visit by a few weeks. This process helped her during follow-up visits to observe new phenomena and to clarify information from observations during structured and unstructured interviews.

### **3.7 ITEMS OF OBSERVATION**

During observations in the newsroom, the researcher looked for specific items that were part of three larger constructs of global properties, shared team properties, and configural team properties (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000, p.215). Klein and Kozlowski (2000) propose the three constructs to help researchers when they are doing multilevel theoretical research between individuals and groups. Since this dissertation focuses on multiple levels that include groups of journalists and how they work with each other, (with news production processes and content), the researcher felt this approach to analyzing the field site might help in the categorization of the results. These constructs were adapted to this study as the conditions necessary for collaboration to occur and became the observable variables the researcher used to code her data. They are tied to the five research questions in the study because they help describe and explain the news organization, who are the people that work for the organization, how they do their work,

what they do, and when they do the work. Explanation of the three properties in the table below follows.

Table 3.2 Application of properties to the newsroom

<b>Global properties</b>	<b>Shared team properties</b>	<b>Configural team properties</b>
The physical location of the group work, whether together or separate by floor, the department and/or the cubicle area in the building.	The time in which the group work happened at specific time periods such as during morning/afternoon/evening shifts and/or across days such as Monday through Friday.	The number of years the journalist has been working in that news organization.
The kind of group work done by what text, audio, video, flash, graphics/art, photos are shared among each other.	The amount of statements made of <i>I</i> versus <i>We</i> in communication in the group.	The number of years the journalist has been working in the industry. The competition the journalists identify with (geographically and by media type).
The time of daily group budget meetings.	If news artifacts were treated as static or developing items.	The motivation that drove them to become an online journalist.
The form of communication used in group work that could include email, instant messenger, telephone, in-person, or other forms of communication.	If coworkers communicated they were a group, team or some other unit in daily conversation.	The number of projects they have done as part of a group.
The location and access of where group work occurred and was saved via a file server, content management system, etc.	The use of excessive talk or belaboring information or nondisclosing communication.	The journalists' country and city of origin.

The global properties “are relatively objective, descriptive, and easily observable team characteristics. Global properties, such as team function, characterize the team as a whole” (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000, p.215). The properties are general in nature and do not reside in the characteristics of the members. Thus, adapting this construct to the

newsroom, the following items can be included for observation but not limited to a global property:

- The physical location of the group work, whether together or separate by floor, the department and/or the cubicle area in the building.
- The kind of group work done by what text, audio, video, flash, graphics/art, photos are shared among each other.
- The time of daily group budget meetings.
- The form of communication used in group work that could include email, instant messenger, telephone, in-person, or other forms of communication.
- The location and access of where group work occurred and was saved via a file server, content management system, etc.

These examples were chosen because they qualify the general setting of how the news organization operates and functions. The examples explain some of the general characteristics of where the journalists work, how they work, when they work, how they communicate and where their work is located. This can help clarify one part of the newsroom culture.

Second, the shared team properties “originate in experiences, attitudes, perceptions, values, cognitions, or behaviors that are held in common by the members of a team. Examples of shared team properties include team cohesion, team norms, team climate, and team mental models” (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000, p.215). The properties are set by characteristics in the members but must be common among the group in order to qualify, otherwise they would just be individual attributes and not a shared attribute

among the group. Thus, adapting this construct to the newsroom, the following items can be included for observation but not limited to a shared team property

- The time in which the group work happened at specific time periods such as during morning/afternoon/evening shifts and/or across days such as Monday through Friday.
- The amount of statements made of *I* versus *We* in communication in the group.
- If news artifacts were treated as static or developing items.
- If coworkers communicated they were a group, team or some other unit in daily conversation.
- The facial expressions, movements, speed of interaction, and location of interaction among the journalists.
- The use of excessive talk or belaboring information or nondisclosing communication.

These examples were chosen because they facilitate how time, resources, interactions and communication are recognized and are perceived by the journalists in these newsrooms. The examples help to explain some of the specific characteristics of the online news workgroup when the work is completed, how the work is perceived and treated, how they communicate and in what form. This can help explain another part of the newsroom culture.

Third, the configural team properties “capture the array, pattern, or variability of individual characteristics within a team....Examples include team interpersonal network density, team personality composition, and team age diversity” (Klein & Kozlowski,

2000, p.217). The properties are specific in nature to the individual member but when placed into the larger context of the whole group, they represent a configural team characteristic. Thus, adapting this construct to the newsroom, the following items can be included for observation but not limited to a configural team property

- The number of years the journalist has been working in that news organization.
- The number of years the journalist has been working in the industry.
- The motivation that drove them to become an online journalist.
- The number of projects they have done as part of a group.
- The form of web training received whether its formal classes, workshops, and/or on-their-own.
- The journalists' country and city of origin.
- The competition the journalists identify with (geographically and by media type).

These examples were chosen because they are characteristics that help to define who the journalists are based on their education, their career experiences, and their training received. The examples explain some of the specific characteristics of the journalists by who they are, where they are from, and what their background is. This composite of the journalist's individual characteristics can help explain another part of the newsroom culture.

These three properties were examined in the two newsrooms to demonstrate group-level analysis of journalists that became part of the data analysis. The types of observations made do overlap with each of the research questions in this study because global, shared and individual characteristics are all part of the phenomena studied and

contribute to the descriptions and explanations of the findings. As these three properties present a suggested construct for multilevel theoretical research (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000) that includes groups and individuals, it is not likely to find a clear demarcation between them. However, since this is an ethnographic study of people in their natural setting, this multilevel approach of the three constructs helps to keep all aspects of the natural setting together (people, resources, artifacts, processes) without isolation, allowing for the macro-level analysis to occur.

### **3.8 FIELDNOTE PROCESS**

As part of the ethnography, the researcher used a two-step process of making jottings and field reports for documenting observations. Writing fieldnotes helps the field researcher to understand what they have witnessed, and how to make adjustments to what they observe from a new lens (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p.15). She assigned a number to each jotting so she could keep track of each observation daily. Some jots were shorthand and abbreviated, others were more lengthy descriptions. At the end of the day, she elaborated on these jotted notes when typing them into a more formal document (See Appendix E for example).

At the end of the each day's visit, she compiled jotted notes into a document and saved them on a computer by date. She then created the field report from the day's events. A field report is a document that helps the researcher to record and to explain observations made of the field site that includes but is not limited to details of interactions, events, behaviors, physical settings, and objects observed. The field report

contained information on the recording conditions (whether done in a journal or via audio recording), initial impressions for the day, phenomena observed (coded by key events and items that appeared to be significant or important to the people she was observing), obstacles encountered in the research conducted, and future planning (See Appendix F for example). Within each field report, the researcher referenced the jotting notes applicable to that report when examples arose. At the end of each week of observations, she reviewed all field reports and created a summary field report of major findings and next steps for observations for the next visit. At this point, she also began to notice major findings in the field reports that could be categorized under the global, shared, and configural team properties and marked them accordingly. In addition to these fieldnotes, she also conducted both structured and unstructured interviews (that are defined in the next section) that contributed to the overall dataset.

### **3.9 INTERVIEWS**

Interviews in ethnography can either be structured or be unstructured (Fontana & Frey, 2005). This study used both methods. Using interviews in addition to observation gives context and clarifies information for the researcher. She spent the first few weeks at each field site observing (but not participating) and then followed up with unstructured and structured interviews to clarify and to gather additional information on observations she made. Structured interviews involve pre-established questions given to all respondents in the same form (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Using this format allowed her to ask respondents the same questions and identify common answers among the staff. Unstructured interviews also began with pre-established questions and some open-ended

questions. The unstructured format allows the respondents to deviate and to expand on their responses during the interview (Fontana & Frey, 2005). This format allowed her to confirm or to clarify observations and allowed for additional questions about the field site that were not included in the structured interviews. For the structured interviews, she created a guide (See Appendix A for example) for each newsroom. In some cases, these questions were asked informally while sitting with the staff at their desks while other interview questions were asked in conference rooms or off-site during a break or a meal. The researcher transcribed the structured interviews and collected 11 structured interviews at *The Chicago Tribune* and 3 structured interviews at *El Norte*. She only conducted three structured interviews at *El Norte* because they were with management personnel only involved in the online operation whereas there were multiple managers involved in the online operation at *The Chicago Tribune*; therefore a larger number of structured interviews were conducted with that news organization. These were audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriber. Unstructured interviews were not audio-recorded and she wrote the responses in a journal that became a part of my data for this study. The criteria for an interview entailed whether the researcher needed a detail that was missing, a clarification, or an explanation of something observed. These interviews helped the researcher in the data-collection process by allowing her to sort information for each newsroom on the common responses received from the structured interviews. For example, the researcher organized the interview responses about questions of the staffs' time schedules into one category of time under global properties of each newsroom since this was a characteristic that was general for the whole online newsroom group. Also, the interviews gave context to observations made in the two

newsrooms. For example, the researcher observed that the online staff came in earlier (6 a.m.) than the print staff (10 a.m. or later) daily and wanted to know why, so the researcher interviewed the editor and learned that the schedule changed in response to a mandate from management regarding updating the site earlier and more often. This example shows that this information may not have been understood by the researcher without a follow-up interview to accrue more details.

During the interview, the researcher considered her influence on the interviewee: “Interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p.716). The researcher remained conscious of this as she conducted each interview, noting her reactions and the respondents’ reactions during the interviews and how this affected the responses received. The researcher would jot down the reactions in the jottings and in the field report accordingly. For example, the researcher interviewed one of the editors of *The Chicago Tribune* staff and noticed that when she did not respond with a nod or a yes to the editor’s questions, the editor continued to talk and ramble giving additional information that may not have been given otherwise. The researcher thought the editor may have been nervous or not comfortable enough to be able to share additional unsolicited details.

The interviewer also needs to be aware of being led by the interviewee to truths they want to impose on the researcher that may be false. The interviewee may want to reflect their perception on the situation and this information must not be taken at face value but validated by asking other informants to confirm or to respond to the information. During the research, the researcher had to consider if the interviewee had

ulterior motives, such as if they had a desire to please me or did not feel comfortable in explaining a situation she observed (Dean & Whyte, 1988, pp.107-108). In addition to interview data, she also collected documentation.

### **3.10 DOCUMENTATION**

During the visits to the field sites, the researcher had the opportunity to obtain access to several types of documents that included news budgets, instructions and materials on specific processes in the newsroom, email communication between staff members, instant messenger communication between staff members, internal memos, strategic documents, traffic reports (of the audience usage) of the website pages, and other internal materials. These documents provided additional information and served as artifacts of the newsroom. In some cases, these documents were confidential (i.e. some examples included instructions on how proprietary systems work and this information could not be shared publicly for competitive industry reasons) and could only serve as context instead of being described in the study. In sum, these documents helped to explain how the journalists operate and communicate in the newsroom.

### **3.11 ANALYSIS**

The data collected in this study were analyzed according to a framework of data management, data reduction, and conceptual development (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The researcher analyzed the information through the phenomenological technique by reviewing the experiences and routines in the environment (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002,

p.237). This technique involved reviewing the jottings and field reports into individual codable pieces.

She coded each fieldnote and transcript by sentence and by paragraph. This process was done manually and through the assistance of a qualitative software program called NVivo 7 (formerly called \*nudist). After this process, she created integrative memos that connected the data to the theory, an approach recommended for the fieldnote process (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The major findings from the field reports and jottings and how this tied to the theories used in this project comprised the integrative memos. Following the memos, she then developed themes that contained excerpts and commentary on the observations and interviews she made. These themes were based on the patterns that evolved in her review of the data collected. She looked for patterns in the data including declaration, frequency, omission, similarity, co-occurrence, corroboration, sequence and/or *a priori* hypothesizing (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). These themes became the major findings discussed in the upcoming chapters.

### **3.12 ETHICS**

In ethnography, the researcher must be considerate of the people and behaviors they observe. The study went through the Institutional Review Board at the University for permission to conduct the study. The researcher distributed consent forms to the participants that explained their role and stated that they could opt out of the project at any time. Also, in an effort to protect the identities of the journalists observed, the researcher informed them that their news organization would be acknowledged in my

research but their names would not be in the study and she would use their position titles instead (i.e. EditorA, JournalistA, CopyeditorA, DesignerA, etc.). Both news organizations are large and have several editors, reporters, and designers on staff which would make it difficult for the reader to know the exact identity of journalists in the newsroom. This form of identification by title has been used successfully in previous ethnographic studies of journalists' work (Breed, 1955; Geiber, 1956; Tuchman, 1978; Boczkowski, 2005; Singer 2006) that helped to protect the journalists under study. As for protecting the data, observation and interview records were for research purposes only and remained in a contained and locked file cabinet area that only the researcher could access.

### **3.13 TRANSLATION OF DATA**

Because this research was a cross-national study, she had to consider the role that the Spanish would have in the research, considering that the *El Norte* newsroom operates within a Spanish-speaking environment. The researcher is fluent in Spanish (more than 15 years of language training) so she was comfortable in translating the data received into English. The researcher hired a translator to double-check the work to ensure that the translations were indeed correct.

### **3.14 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

The next section will detail the results of both newsrooms. First, the field site is explained via descriptions of the workplace, content production, schedules, staff, tools

and technologies, the newsroom, the security, and a snapshot of a day at work are presented to give context for the reader. Then the answers to each research question are presented by newsroom. Each research question has a series of findings based on observations and interviews conducted in the newsrooms. For instance, the first research question of what are the characteristics of an online news workgroup in *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* is answered by describing five findings for each newsroom. Subsequently, the remaining four research questions follow the same format.

## **Chapter 4: Results: *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte***

In this chapter, each field site is explained first via descriptions of the workplace, content production, schedules, staff, tools and technologies, the newsroom, and a snapshot of a day at work. Second, answers to the research questions are presented by newsroom. Each research question has a series of findings that are based on interviews and on observations from the two newsrooms.

In this investigation, the researcher examines the online news production process at *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* newsrooms. The fieldnote excerpts in this chapter describe how groups of journalists collaborate as part of the online news production process.

The argument stated in this section is that the online news workgroup's collaboration affects the journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness in the content they manage. The types of culture and of communication apparent among the group of journalists provide significant influence. The following sections will answer the research questions expanded upon in earlier chapters: What are the characteristics of an online news workgroup in the online newsroom? What form of collaboration is employed in the online newsroom? What are the collaborative traits of the online news production process? To what degree is the online newsroom a collectivistic or individualistic culture? A low-or high-context communication culture? All questions above tie into one overall research question: Do the news routines of the online news workgroups support or interfere with the journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness?

## **4.1 THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE: THE SETTING**

Before launching into the observations of this newsroom, it is necessary to provide an overview of the setting. *The Chicago Tribune* is part of the newspaper organization of the parent media company, Tribune Company. The Tribune Company owns 11 metro 7-day newspapers and 23 broadcast stations. As a private company, they have about 20,000 employees and operating revenues of \$5.5 billion as of 2006. There are over 200 employees working for the print newspaper and approximately 30 that work separately for the online operation (this includes news editorial, sports, entertainment, advertising/marketing group, and senior management).

### **4.1.1 Content production**

The paper has a fairly large news editorial staff but the specific groups that observed by the researcher included the daily producers, the designers and the editors that manage the online production process. There is an automatic mass publishing (i.e. news content moves from an internal system to a Web server) of all the content from the paper to the online site at 5:30 a.m. daily. Online staff members then update the site over the course of the rest of the day.

### **4.1.2 Schedules**

The online staff have several shifts of producers and editors to manage the site with the following work shifts beginning at 5 a.m., 8 a.m., 10 a.m., 3 p.m., 5 p.m., and 11 p.m.. The online staff started working earlier shifts (5 a.m. – 10 a.m. timeframe) this year

as a result of the innovation editor's request to have content production connect with the high traffic moments on the site. The innovation editor plays a crucial role in the newsroom: "oversee a restructured editorial department merging the multi-media staff and the 24-hour continuous news desk and supervise all online news and feature operations" ("Chicago Tribune," 2006). As part of the daily routine, the online staff rotates the responsibility of updating the "front" page of the site in two-hour shifts throughout the day.

#### **4.1.3 The staff**

The staff of 12 observed in this study have journalism backgrounds from a variety of media, other newspapers and from other departments within the Tribune Company. The length of time the staff members have been with the online operation range from less than a year to more than 12 years. The news organization has a continuous news desk (an area in the newsroom that is occupied by one or more journalists to monitor the news all day, all-night long and update the website when breaking news occurs) that consists of two people, managed by editors from the print staff. Two copy editors come in during the day to assist with the web copy. A couple designers from other departments assist with the creation of multimedia on the site while a few photographers and videographers from other departments also assist with making photo galleries and videos for the site. At the time of this study, the news organization was in a moment of transition in which staff from the print operation were being trained to update and manage sections of the site that

previously overseen by the online operation. The staffing of the website was in flux and this study captures the staffing of this online operation at one moment in time.

#### **4.1.4 Tools and technologies**

The online staff use a variety of resources, in this dissertation also called artifacts that include content management systems; systems for managing reader feedback; wire services; applications for manipulating images, graphics, videos and photos; communication tools such as email and instant messenger, and web traffic software to view usage of specific areas of the site.

#### **4.1.5 The newsroom**

A long-standing tradition in the newspaper is the location of the news editorial staffers. They are on one floor of the building, separated from the advertising and circulation departments located elsewhere in the same building. The online staff shares this floor with the news editorial staff. In April 2007 the online staff moved from one side of the floor to an area closer to the news editorial desks because the innovation editor wanted closer integration between the online and print staffs.

The bright fluorescent lights shine on the cubicles while the pale brownish and white paint on the walls give the newsroom an almost hygienic-yet-serene atmosphere. The newsroom becomes noisy as the day progresses with phones ringing and faint conversations that roll in and out from one side of the newsroom to the other. The cubicles in this newsroom are as unique as the people who sit in each one. Some cubicles

have hardly any items in them with the exception of a small television, computer monitor and a few pieces of paper. Others have piles of books and pictures of their pets and/or family and friends scattered across the desk in festive or formal picture frames. Paper coffee cups from the cafeteria downstairs or from the Starbucks across the street litter many of the desks in this newsroom. Caffeine is a necessity here. In some cases, you will find the occasional mega-size coffee cup for the journalist who needs more another caffeine jolt to get through the morning's online news production process.

#### **4.1.6 The security**

When people enter the Tribune newspaper building, they instantly know they are in all the gray stone grandeur of the Tribune tower. Journalists are greeted by a desk of two security guards who will request identification and ask them to swipe into a machine with their employee identification card before entering their office building. Visitors and guests must sign in and then security will assist them in contacting the person they want to visit. Security guards are necessary to ensure only journalists and Tribune employees enter the building. Because of anonymity concerns as well as those for the security and safety of the journalists who work for this organization, specific details and schematic layouts of the newsroom and the building will not be given.

#### **4.1.7 The national culture embedded in the newsroom**

*The Chicago Tribune* does have its own organizational culture. The organization is in the United States, a nation with its own national culture. The researcher observed these national characteristics in the newsroom and deemed them also to contribute the overall organizational culture of the newsroom. These characteristics include how the journalists interacted with each other and how they did their work. United States national culture has been considered by some as individualistic, formal, distant, and impersonal (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Hall & Hall, 1987). For example, the journalists are formal in wearing business attire in the office versus casual clothing (occasionally on the weekends). This creates a business-like, formal environment. The office is fairly quiet throughout the day and the sounds of chatter or loud talking are not as common, again, contributing to a formal, business-like environment.

In greetings, the journalists will say good morning or goodbye to each other from a distance at their cubicles or in some cases will not exchange salutations at all. When the journalists want to speak with each other in person, the person will approach the edge of the cubicle but stop short of entering, to give that perceived distance so characteristic of space and distance common in the U.S. national culture. As for breaks or meals, the journalists will occasionally go downstairs to the cafeteria or to a restaurant together, but it is not common. The scheduling and limited resources does not permit all of the online news workgroup to leave *en masse* to eat or to take a break, but the researcher did observe they would go on breaks together in groups of two or three. The staff usually will

go individually and eat alone – whether at their desk or in another location. These are just a few examples of how the U.S. national culture is reflected in this organization. This is not to say that all the staff members act in this way nor act this way each time. This is based on the observations made at this given period of time among the group the researcher observed. These were some of the general characteristics of the national culture she saw repeated daily in the newsroom among the online news workgroup.

#### **4.1.8 Everyday is not typical**

Throughout the morning, the producers of the site busily post and update content to the various sections of the site. It can range from uploading video to photos to special projects that need to launch that day. Others work on creating discussions to drive readers to participate with the website. This includes posting the question of the day on the site, monitoring the comments board or moderating a videochat between a Tribune journalist and online readers on a salient issue for that day or week. Other producers work on the daily newsletter emailed to readers every morning that recaps the stories from overnight and the early morning. Crafting the newsletter rich with content and some photos is a special skill possessed by only a few producers, leaving the responsibility of producing the newsletter to a select few.

For this online staff, the art of writing a good headline and brief on the site is almost a science. They have the knowledge and the understanding of their readers to know what works as well and how they can communicate with the reader with integrity and without sensationalism.

Throughout the day, the producers continually update and post content to the various sections of the site. When breaking news occurs on a local or a national level, the editor and producers make fast and careful decisions regarding the basic information that needs to be posted, along with any additional content that can be included. Decisions are made as to the layout of the current homepage and how this structure will change with the influence of a breaking news story.

After major news events occur, the staff goes back to its daily tasks that include attending budget or planning meetings for upcoming stories or packages, training print staff on how to make a blog post or how to use the content management system, answering the deluge of emails from within and outside the news organization for requests, and adding resources to stories.

In addition, the staff's computers sound when an instant message comes across an online staff member's computer. Throughout the day, the producers and editors will use instant messenger to converse, send, correct, clarify, edit or decide what information goes where and how on the site. Since its implementation six years ago, this tool has become valuable in the daily online news production process. In the midst of all these activities, the staff will find time to run to the cafeteria for food or to a restaurant nearby to pick up an order. Eating at the desk is common here in the newsroom. Having the time to go out and sit for an hour for lunch is a luxury for these producers, who work in a 24/7 news production machine.

As the evening arrives, the online newsroom staff transitions into night mode. The other side of the newsroom, where the print staff is situated, is no longer silent but a buzz of activity. All the editors and reporters are sitting at their desks as the print product

begins to come alive again. The ambience of this newsroom changes as one can hear the quick typing of fingers on computer keyboards, the faint sound of a few television news programs, and the constant ring of telephones.

On the other side of the newsroom, the online staff is just as busy. They are constantly making updates and changes to the site with the occasional journalist coming by to ask for information related to the website. The queries range from where to post a photo, how to access the content management system or how to upload a story to the site. The staff will work until the late hours of the night, usually until 2 a.m. The morning crew will make its way into the office at 5 a.m., just as the sun starts to rise over Chicago. The process starts anew but, as always, the producers know every day is different in this online newsroom.

#### **4.2 EL NORTE: THE SETTING**

The other newspaper in this study is *El Norte*, part of the parent media company, The Reforma Group. The Reforma Group is a private company in Mexico with over 700 employees that operates *El Norte* and three other newspapers (*Reforma*, *Mural*, *Palabra*) that is run by the Alejandro Junco de la Vega family. The print newspaper and online operation of *El Norte* make a combined staff of 200.

Alejandro Junco de la Vega's grandfather ran *El Norte* from 1938 until 1973 when Alejandro and his brother, Roldolfo, subsequently inherited the newspaper. Alejandro Junco de la Vega earned his bachelor's in journalism in 1969 from the University of Texas at Austin and his American training influenced the kind of

journalism practiced in this news organization. In fact, Alejandro Junco de la Vega had a University of Texas at Austin professor, Mary Gardner, visit the news operations once a year for several years to help train the staff in specific journalism practices and techniques (“Who we are,” 2007; Alves, 2005). According to *El Norte*/Group Reforma company statements:

Con la red más extensa de periodistas profesionales cubriendo México, Grupo REFORMA es la institución informativa con más credibilidad y prestigio en el País.

A través de sus periódicos, sitios de Internet y servicios informativos, Grupo REFORMA marca la agenda informativa de la sociedad mexicana.

Un equipo de 700 reporteros y fotógrafos en las tres principales ciudades del País y una red de corresponsales en toda la República captan la imagen del México actual. Junto a ellos, enviados en las principales capitales del mundo ofrecen una visión del panorama global (“Who we are,” n.d.).

[With the most extensive network of professional journalists covering Mexico, Group Reforma is the informative institution with the most credibility and prestige in the country.

Through its newspapers, websites, and information services, Group Reforma sets the agenda for Mexican society.

A team of 700 reporters and photographers in the three major cities of the country and a network of correspondents throughout the Republic capture the image of Mexico today, sending a global vision of the world (“Who we are,” n.d.).]

According to the director who manages the web initiatives for *El Norte* and Group Reforma, the goal is to help the reader have the information needed to make decisions and to be an informed citizen in Monterrey:

...poder ayudar para que los lectores tomen decisiones de calidad; y... somos en, en el grupo Reforma, convencidos de que, para que la ciudadanía pueda tomar decisiones de calidad, tiene que tener a la mano información de calidad, y, es... son decisiones de calidad cuando me refiero a: ¿por quién votar?, ¿a qué eh... equipo de fútbol apoyar?, ¿qué producto comercial comprar?, en fin, entonces,

entre más información de calidad tenga un ciudadano, mejor, mejores decisiones va a poder tomar (Online director, personal communication, July 2007).

[...to give the power to the readers to take quality decisions; and... we in Group Reforma, we are convinced that for the citizen to make quality decisions, they have to have at hand quality information and yes, they are decisions of quality when I refer to : for whom do I vote? What soccer team needs help? What commercial product do I buy? Finally, then, between more quality citizen information, the best decisions are going to be made (Online director, personal communication, July 2007).]

#### **4.2.1 Content production**

The paper has a news editorial staff that is fairly large, but the specific groups that the researcher observed included the section editors, the designers and the reporters that contribute to the online production process. The paper has a mass publishing (i.e. moving news content from internal system to the Web server) of all the content from the paper to the online site at 5 a.m. daily. The online staff then updates the site throughout the day.

#### **4.2.2 Schedules**

The paper has several shifts of editors to manage the site with the following work shifts beginning at 6 a.m., 10 a.m., 3 p.m., 4 p.m. and 11 p.m. As part of the daily routine, the staff will rotate the responsibility of updating the homepage of the site throughout the day.

### **4.2.3 The staff**

The staff of 13 observed in this study have varied backgrounds ranging from journalism to business administration to political communication. The length of time the staff members have been with the online operation range from one year to more than a decade. They also have an agency of six people who write the stories dictated to them by the reporters out in the field. These stories will get placed into the wire system for pulling into the website or the print paper later in the day. Throughout all sections of the newspaper, there is a web editor counterpart for the print editor to help load content to the site for the appropriate section. This study observed the sports, features, local, state, homepage and business web editors.

### **4.2.4 Tools and technologies**

The online staff will use a variety of resources or artifacts, as they are called in this dissertation, that include content management systems; systems for managing reader contributions; wire services; applications for manipulating images, graphics, videos and photos; communication tools such as email and instant messenger, and web traffic software to view usage of specific areas of the site. In this newsroom, there is little use of printed documents. Many forms of documentation are distributed electronically.

#### 4.2.5 The newsroom

The location of the news editorial staff is across two floors of the building, separate from the advertising and circulation departments housed on other floors. On these two floors, the news editorial and the online staffs are grouped by section such as local news, national, soft news, sports and business. There are other groups on these two floors including the photographers with their own separate area on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor adjacent to a video-editing suite and studio used by the online staff and the videographers.

The integration of the news editorial staff and online staff happened in 1999 after management decided to have one newsroom for synergistic purposes. The director of the web operations for *El Norte* and Group Reforma discussed how the decision for integration was made below:

Y, este, en el, en el '99 estuvimos analizando ambas... alternativas y finalmente decidimos irnos por la opción de tener una sola redacción, integrada, multimedia, que entendiera que su labor era darle información a los distintos canales de distribución de esta información. Entonces...fue una decisión que tomamos. Ha sido una decisión difícil porque nos ha tomado mucho tiempo evangelizar a los reporteros, sobre todo a los reporteros que ya tienen tiempo trabajando este, y estaban acostumbrados a una rutina de "print"... nos ha llevado tiempo evangelizar para tratar de mentalizarlos de, de la importancia de, de manejar la información en tiempo real, de hablar desde el lugar de los hechos para dar a conocer la información.

Entonces ha sido un camino difícil, tortuoso que ha requerido de mucha insistencia, de mucha evangelización pero creo que, al fin del día, ha sido la decisión correcta (Online director, personal communication, July 2007).

[And this in 1999, we analyzed enough....alternatives and finally we decided to go with the option to have one newsroom, integrated, multimedia, that would be understood by their labor to give information through distinct information

channels of distribution. Then, we took the decision. It was a difficult decision because we didn't have too much time to evangelize the reporters, the reporters already knew how to work but they were accustomed to a "print" routine. We had arrived at a time to evangelize the importance of managing the information in real time, of speaking from this perspective and giving this information to the staff. It was a difficult road, that required insistence, but I believe that, at the end of the day, we made the correct decision (Online director, personal communication, July 2007).]

The *El Norte* newsroom is unique because of the sunroof windows that allow natural light down to the open courtyard area below that is surrounded by tall, faux trees. Interspersed throughout the courtyard is patio furniture that the newspaper staff utilizes from time to time to have small, impromptu meetings. This courtyard area extends from the 6<sup>th</sup> floor and down to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, giving the newsroom an open and inviting feel to it. The cubicles of the different news sections surround the courtyard area and make the newsroom a bustling and noisy area as the hours pass. Throughout the day, the newsroom is filled with the faint sounds of conversations that carry from one side of the courtyard to the other. As one sits at his or her cubicle, he or she can hear several unique sounds throughout the day – from the sound of high heels scurrying across the marble floors to the ringing of telephones to the short tunes coming from journalists' cell phones. One can hear coins drop from the vending machine in the newsroom where someone has just bought a Coke or pepita (snacks such as potato chips) to keep energy levels high throughout the day.

#### **4.2.6 The security**

A unique aspect to this newsroom is the level of security. Considering the dangers to journalists in Mexico and the history of murders, kidnappings and other forms of harassment to members of the media, this news organization takes the security of their employees seriously.

The level of security is palpable from the moment a person walks through the dark glass doors of the newspaper building and enters a lobby where several bodyguards sit on duty and where stands a special metal detector machine through which all *El Norte* employees must pass to enter the building. The researcher observed that if a food delivery order arrived for the staff, the staff member would have to go down to the lobby to retrieve it from the delivery person. Delivery personnel were not allowed access either to offices or to other areas of the building.

Once inside, it is not uncommon to see bodyguards patrolling the building and to ensure everything remains protected and secure. Security cameras are common and are clearly visible on every floor. As for the newsroom itself, there are no name placards on the desks to delineate any of the journalists. Another form of protecting the journalists in this newsroom from danger includes not identifying journalists on certain, particularly inflammatory stories when they are published.

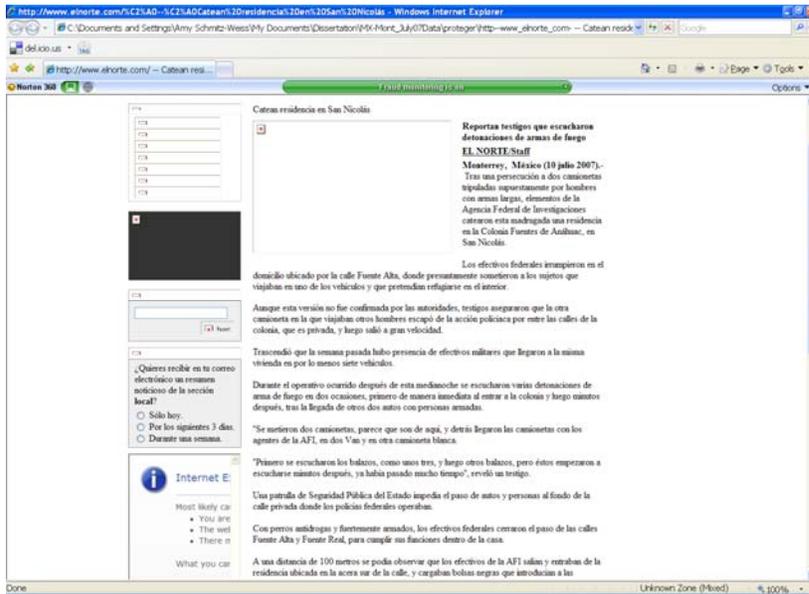


Illustration 4.1: Example of a story from July 2007 of journalists' names being omitted from the story for protection and security purposes. The story is about a residence in Monterrey that was raided by the police for arms and drugs.

Occasionally, if a sensitive or dangerous story is covered, the journalists' bylines may be removed from the story. As part of the news production process, keeping the journalists safe consistently remains one of the top priorities of management. The editor of the print newspaper stated how much journalism in Mexico have changed and how they need to protect their journalists by not publishing their names in the paper, depending on the situation:

...para tranquilidad de ellos no se firman las notas que tengan que ver con, con tema de peligro para ellos y es a petición de ellos... no es... y, algunas veces si es así como que “no exageres, ¿verdad? no podemos darle la señal al lector de que esa no”... pero, de un tiempo para acá, las cosas han cambiado mucho, mucho, mucho, mucho, mucho, mucho (Editor of print newspaper, personal communication, July 2007).

[...for the tranquility of them (journalists) we don't publish their names on stories that have a theme of danger for them, and is a petition of them, this is how it is. No exaggerating, that is the truth. We can't give the signal to the reader that this is so, but this is how things are in this age, things have changed much, much, much, much (Editor of print newspaper, personal communication, July 2007).]

Due to these safety concerns for the journalists at *El Norte*, specific details and schematic layouts of the newsroom and the building will not be given in an effort to protect the journalists that work for this organization.

#### **4.2.7 The national culture embedded in the newsroom**

*El Norte* does have its own organizational culture. However, the organization is in Mexico, a country whose national culture has been considered by some as collectivistic, personal, and a form of “togetherness” (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Díaz-Guerrero, 1967). In addition, the national culture has been identified for how class is communicated through “respeto (respect)” and “confianza (confide)” to establish levels of formality and acknowledgment of class through the levels of closeness achieved with strangers and with colleagues (Garcia, 1996; Covarrubias, 2002). For example, the journalists wear formal business attire in *El Norte*, as opposed to casual clothing (occasionally on the weekends). This creates a business-like, formal environment. Staff members address each

other respectfully if they are not close colleagues or friends and this can be identified through the forms of “tu” and “usted,” that is the informal and formal (respectively) way of addressing another person in Spanish.

In greetings, the journalists will say good morning or goodbye to each other with a handshake or a kiss on the cheek. This is a very common form of greeting in the Mexican culture. While under observation, very rarely did a journalist not say a greeting or goodbye to each other in this form.

When the journalists want to speak with each other in person, the person will come up to their colleague and enter their cubicle, as the notion of an imagined distance does not exist as it may for the journalists in the United States culture.

As for breaks or meals, commonly the journalists go to the cafeteria or to a restaurant together. At times, the scheduling and limited resources did not permit all of the online news workgroup to leave at one time to eat or to take a break, but the researcher did observe they would go on breaks together in groups of two or three. Most of the time, the staff will eat food brought from home and the cafeteria will be so filled with people that by the time the researcher came to join them, sometimes there was not a spot left at the table. Rarely did the researcher see a journalist eat at his or her desk or alone. In fact, when the researcher sat in the cafeteria by herself, the journalists eyed her strangely and in some cases ask to join her so she would not have to eat alone. Also, the journalists would go in groups of two or more to the vending machine to get a drink or pepita (a snack) and chat by the machine before going back to their desks. These forms of “togetherness” can be seen in how eating and breaks are a group activity.

Another example of Mexican culture is chivalry in the work environment and the amount of times the researcher observed men opening doors for women or letting women pass through building entry ways first, before the men went through them. When the researcher went out with journalists for lunch or to cover a story, the men always walked on the side of the street while the woman remained on the inside of the street closer to the buildings, as a sign of implied protection. When the researcher or other women journalists walked on the street side, the men intrinsically and automatically moved over to make sure they were on the street side.

These are just a few examples of how the Mexican culture is reflected in this organization. This is not to say that all the staff members act in this way nor act this way each time. This is based on the observations made at this given period of time among the group the researcher observed. These were some of the general characteristics of the national culture she saw repeated daily in the newsroom among the online news workgroup.

#### **4.2.8 Everyday is not typical**

Throughout the morning, the editors of the *El Norte* site are busily posting news and updating news to the various sections of the site. It can range from uploading photos to posting a developing news story coming from the internal agency (their own wire service within the news organization) to sending out a SMS (Short Message Service or known as text messaging) to their cell phone subscribers to advise of breaking news.

Throughout the day, the editors will rewrite headlines, briefs and text from stories that come through the content management system and wires before posting them to the site. When news breaks, the editors will gather in person, via instant messenger and/or telephone, to discuss the best way to articulate the story on the website. The staff makes careful and timely decisions and uses caution before posting any information on their site.

Aside from when news events occur, the staff will have other daily tasks that include attending budget or planning meetings for upcoming stories or packages for the website, and answering the deluge of emails both from within and from outside the news organization. The staff also will manage readers' contributions that include but are not limited to letters to the editor, individual comments on stories, user-generated videos, and photos. They also will spend time viewing websites of their sister papers, *Reforma* and others (*Palabra*, *Mural*) throughout the day to see how they are covering specific stories and make changes accordingly to the *El Norte* website. In some cases, they will identify errors in information or stories and contact the web staff at the sister papers.

Throughout the day, as news is posted to the site and is pulled from the various resources, the editors will communicate with each other via instant messenger. They will get a little blinking screen in the corner of their computer desktop to notify them that an editor has just sent a message. In some cases, these messages will be clarifications on the spelling or the grammar of a headline to appear on the site. In other cases, it will notify an editor of breaking news on the wires or elsewhere and ask whether it should be posted on the site. The influence of instant messenger is strong and pervasive in this newsroom. According to the editor who oversees the *El Norte* website, the use of this tool among his staff in the newsroom has intensified in the past three years. When the members arrive at

the office to start their day, the computer automatically will login to their instant messenger account and the messages will start arriving.

As evening arrives, the courtyard uses fluorescent lights to brighten the newsroom. The newsroom becomes a buzz of activity as sounds come alive – from fingers busily typing on keyboards and the ring tones of journalists’ cell phones to the scurrying of feet across the marble floors. The online news staff will meet to discuss the layout of webpages for the evening and morning hours. They will make plans as to what teasers or promotional boxes of website content should appear in print tomorrow to drive readers to the website. Meanwhile, as news events break during the evening, the editors will post the news accordingly to the site. As stories come in from the print newspaper, an editor will post them to the website. For the staff assigned to updating the homepage in the evening, the editor will call it a night by 2 a.m. The online news staff will make their way back into the newsroom a few hours later at 6 a.m. and the news production process begins again.

## **THE MAJOR FINDINGS**

Specific observations on how the journalists collaborate in the news production process will now be presented by order of research question. Each research question is answered by how observations and interviews were connected to a series of global, shared team and configural team characteristics (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000, p.215). These characteristics help detail the conditions that help facilitate collaboration in the newsroom.

As a reminder, global properties of collaboration include the physical location of the group work, what kind of work is shared or not, the form of communication used among the group members, and the location and access where group work occurs. For example at this level, the condition of collaboration to occur in the online newsroom is high when the online journalists are all working in the same area of the same floor of the building versus in separate sections or separate floors of the same building. Shared team properties of collaboration include the time in which the group work happens, if coworkers identify themselves as part of a group, team or other, and the usage of “I” or “We” in conversations. For example, at this level, the condition of collaboration to occur in the online newsroom is high when the online journalists share the same work schedule (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) of posting content to all the sections of the news website. Configural team properties of collaboration include the number of journalists that share similar characteristics of work experience, education and training, and their city and country of origin. At this level, for example, to facilitate collaboration in the online newsroom if a group of online journalists all have the same number of years of experience of working in the online operation of the news organization. As a result, their common work experience makes it easier for them to understand, communicate and work with each other (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000).

The culture of each online newsroom will now be described in the following sections by the characteristics of the online news workgroup (section 4.3), how members of the workgroup collaborate (4.4), how the online news workgroup collaborates during the news production process (section 4.5), if the online staffers work together or

individually and if the online staffers communicate explicitly or implicitly (section 4.6), and how they work with the news content they post on the website (section 4.7). The structure of the online news workgroup at *The Chicago Tribune* and then *El Norte* will be discussed next.

### **4.3 THE CULTURE IN THE NEWSROOM: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ONLINE NEWS WORKGROUP**

The first question in this study is what are the characteristics of an online news workgroup within the newsroom? The definition for an online news workgroup is adapted from Greenbaum and Query (1999): “three or more persons who perceive themselves to be a work group, interact somewhat regularly together over time, and are embedded within a network of interlocking tasks, roles, and relationships that often include interacting with other work groups or individuals within and/or outside the organization” (p.540). In this study, the group of journalists is identified as online news workgroups. Online news workgroups can be defined as a set of three or more individuals that make a group with a common goal or task to complete in the online newsroom.

The online news workgroup in *The Chicago Tribune* is not as explicit or as clearly visible when you are in the newsroom. There is no formal recognition or structure to show that the group exists among the staff, almost as if it is invisible and it occurs naturally. During observations, group members were intertwined simultaneously in other groups. The researcher identified six variations of workgroups (six groupings of three or more online journalists working together such as producers, designers and reporters) in the online newsroom during the daily production process. Since the journalists were in

several groups at the same time, this allowed for a group structure to change often. This structure demonstrates how much the online news workgroup is a flexible and invisible entity in *The Chicago Tribune*.

The online news workgroup in *El Norte* is a flexible entity and consists of various characteristics. The researcher identified nine variations of workgroups (nine groupings of three or more online journalists working together such as producers, designers and reporters) in the online newsroom during the daily production process. Also, since the journalists were in several groups at the same time, this allowed for a group structure to change often. Such structure demonstrates how much the online news workgroup is informal and flexible as the groups change accordingly to suit the needs of the day.

#### **4.3.1 Major Findings of *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte***

The online news workgroups in *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* can be described by a combination of readily observed factors in the newsroom that included: (1) the physical location of the group work in news production, (2) the time of the daily group meetings among the staff, (3) the form of communication used in the group work, (4) the virtual or online location and access of where the group work was saved and worked on, and (5) the time in which the news production occurred. These five factors facilitate in explaining a workgroup by Greenbaum and Query (1999) mentioned earlier that includes the regular interaction and the interlocking of tasks, roles and relationships among the members of the group (p.540).

First, the physical location of the group work in news production demonstrates how the physical place plays a role in the formation of an informal and formal group. In addition to formal groups constructed by management, informal groups also will develop naturally because of their proximity to each other in their working environment. The online staff at *The Chicago Tribune* moved in April from a separate and remote area of the floor to the midst of the news-editorial section on the same floor. Online staffers have cubicles of the same height (about 4 feet tall) in vicinity to each other, demonstrating a physical structure that shows each staff member has an equal space in the office and (implicitly) power among the staff.

The following excerpt from an interview details how the location of the group work plays an important role in the daily and hourly news production process. The innovation editor describes why the online staff moved to the print area of the newsroom. The editor also describes in this excerpt how the use of an internal communication area of a private chat room among the online staff has grown in the number of participants because of the number of print staff joining the chat room to help or to be aware of the online news production process, such as copy editors or other section editors from the print operation.

I thought by having the web staff way in the back as the bastard red-haired stepchild of the newsroom -- children of the newsroom -- was just...I had to get them out in the middle of the newsroom. And I just think .... having the Metro Editor,\* , come over and sit there...having the Metro Editor sitting there, standing there, just being able to pass by and see what we're thinking and find out what he's thinking is just a tremendous benefit and just one of the small ones. I mean, it's just funny, ... the number of people on CT web (the online operation), has grown exponentially. The number of people in that chat room (internal communication area for the online staff) has grown exponentially. That's, theoretically, the people on CT web eventually would be 600 people (including the print and online operation), so I don't know ... and I've had to create, keep

creating distribution lists in my email to sort of get it down to a reasonable number again.

\* names have been omitted.

This explains the need to make the proximity of the new online staff closer to the print staff in an effort to make the news production process a shared activity between the two staffs. This additional excerpt from an interview with the innovation editor also details how the change of the staff's location ties to an evolution in the perception responsibilities among both staffs. The editor states that in his first month after taking the job, he followed the advice of a colleague and observed before making changes, and did not take any action.

Well, my goal for about the first month or so was just to find out -- to sort of be on a fact finding mission. Somebody told me, 'Don't do anything...' Editor\* was sitting to the right of me there. She was in the Peace Corps. And she said that their first rule was, 'Don't do anything for the first 90 days, because the natives will reject it.' But I didn't think I had 90 days to spare, so I waited 30 days and then started to look at integrating what I could....I realized quickly that the web staff was at full capacity as far as what work they could handle. So any work that I created had to be done by the rest of the newsroom. So I sort of developed my philosophy of, 'Ask not what your website can do for you; ask what you can do for your website.' And taking that sort of motto forward with me. I think the other thing is I've come on at a perfect time where the newsroom realizes that things are changing and that they need to change. And so it's, 'If you think photo editors are important to print edition, then I suggest you figure out a way to make them important for the web edition. If you think copy editors are important for the print edition, then they must be important for the web edition, and let's figure out a way to add them.:' And so, you can see how that's come along in the time since -- ...The Metro copy editors coming on the site (logging into the content management system of the online operation and copyediting the content) and working the copy.

\* names have been omitted.

Once again this interview excerpt details how the location of work has an impact on the news production process, whether it's a group of online producers working together or a group of print copyeditors working with a group of online producers. Moving the online newsroom to another side of the floor earlier in the year allowed the online staff the opportunity to continue its normal production routines but also to have more access to other resources (i.e. designers, reporters, copy editors, etc.) in the newsroom and to share in the activity (i.e. newsgathering or reporting) of news production with the print publication. This move also meant the online news staff members would have a different cubicle and new cubicle neighbors from different sections of the print operation. This location of where the online news group work is done also defines an online news workgroup because the members are close in vicinity to each other and to the print staff as part of the larger news production process.

At *El Norte*, the online newsroom staff is positioned in staggered cubicles of three to four alongside of each other amongst the print newspaper staff, integrating two staffs. The physical spacing of the cubicles for the online staff is different from the other cubicles in the newsroom because the cubicles are positioned diagonally where staffers can easily communicate and see each other, yet still maintain some privacy. In some areas of the newsroom, the cubicle walls are five- to six-foot tall, so journalists on the other side can't see what is happening but they still can walk around to the other side and communicate. Upper management, including the directors and section editors, has offices along the walls of the newsroom. They have glass-walled offices, allowing anyone at anytime to openly see the editor or the director, making their work "transparent" to all in the newsroom, as well as fostering a sense of availability to their staff. The online staff

members are compartmentalized by section that correspond to a newspaper section, so the sports online staff will be grouped with the sports journalists and editors of the print newspaper. The local, state and national sections of the print newspaper work close to the homepage online staff. This grouping by sections allows the online news workgroups to work closely with each other and with the print staff as they work on the website.

Another unique aspect of the physical space at *El Norte* involves the online staff that manages the homepage. They share cubicles throughout the day and rotate using the same cubicle amongst each other. For example, as online editors complete their shifts, the next online editor will come in to start his or her shift and sit in the same cubicle and use the same computer and the same equipment. If an editor takes a break or lunch, another editor will come in and sit at the same cubicle to cover the homepage while the first editor is gone. Many times, the cubicles of the homepage staff are not owned by one particular person but shared amongst the online news workgroup.

These examples demonstrate how physical location and vicinity of the *El Norte* online news workgroup members to each other contributes to a shared space which facilitates the news production process. The closeness allows for communication to easily flow and fosters the formation of groups, both formally and informally.

Another factor that helps to facilitate in explaining the online news workgroup is the time of daily group meetings among the staff. This factor demonstrates the roles of a shared notion of time and schedules in the formation of groups when they have shared tasks and activities to complete.

*The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom has a standard set of daily meetings that structure the news and the activities for the day. These include a meeting with the online

staff at 9 a.m., a multimedia meeting immediately thereafter and an 11:30 a.m. web meeting that is a discussion of the news to be posted based on discussions from the 11 a.m. print staff meeting. Aside from these meetings, the continuous news staff has a conference call with three partners of radio, television, and metro desk of the print newspaper, at 8:30 a.m., and 4:30 p.m., to discuss developing news and what news they can share. The section editors (i.e. business, metro, features, etc.) of the print newspaper will meet throughout the day to budget their news and the Page One meeting will be held at 3:30 p.m.

These daily meetings help orient the online newsroom staff to different priorities as it relates to current or upcoming news events. There also are several weekly meetings to plan for more long-term stories including a weekly multimedia meeting with the features section staff, and the electronic news group that includes the television station, and online staff. This key event helps the staff plan of large-scale and multiple media packages. Editors distribute several schedules and details during the meeting, ranging from video to photography elements needed for the stories. Overall, these meetings organize and structure the news production process for the online newsroom staff. These meetings also help to define how the online news workgroup works and with whom the group works.

In addition, the meeting time also serves to communicate to the staff what might not otherwise be communicated. Below is an interview excerpt that details how the 9 a.m. meeting among the online staff was recently added because the innovation editor thought a recap of the morning's events necessary, due the high traffic that the site receives during those hours.

No, I added those. Yeah, I added the nine o'clock meeting because I've been preaching to everybody, 'Hey, early, early, early,' right? And I thought that we were meeting just that one 11:30 meeting and that was not (sic. enough)... If half our readers are gone by noon, any kind of course correction, right, wasn't happening early enough. So you are basically, 'Oh, well, we could have done this. We should have done this,' And it went to my whole thing about, I didn't think the site was ready early enough if we really believe that people were starting to come there at six a.m., which is what everybody told me. 'Why aren't we starting earlier?' That's when ProducerA and ProducerB\* started at 5:30 until 6:00.

\*names changed to protect identities

By sharing a common daily meeting time, the online news workgroup of *The Chicago Tribune* can structure the flow of news production and define how they work. Scheduling these meetings creates a form of shared time the online news workgroup acknowledges and defines their group culture.

The *El Norte* online news workgroup shares a common time for daily group meetings and schedules that also helps to contribute to their formation as a group.

The online editor of *El Norte* will attend the daily 11 a.m. meeting where the print editors will discuss upcoming news and what was covered in the paper that day. The online editor will contribute by stating what news and information the online staff is following that morning and afternoon. All editors can view the top stories and top multimedia from the website of the previous day on the glass wall of the conference room.

Another meeting is held in the afternoon at 4:30 p.m., with the Page One staff of the newspaper to discuss the events of the day and what stories will go into the front page of each section. They then follow this meeting a conference call at 5 p.m. with the sister papers editors to discuss what they will feature on their front pages of their newspapers.

Aside from these major meetings, each print section will have its own budget meetings to discuss news events, and this information will be given to the online editor of the section accordingly.

After the 5 p.m. meeting, the online editor will meet with his staff to inform them of the news coming for the evening and the next day. The online news workgroup will determine the agenda for the night and the page layout for their stories.

The online staff members of *El Norte* are aware of the print newspaper meetings and they expect the online editor to inform them accordingly of what may be imminent and how they can schedule their news production process for the day. This example demonstrates how much a shared notion of time and these meetings contribute to how the *El Norte* online staff organizes and plans its day. It contributes to members' understanding of what a schedule and a meeting that helps to define the online news workgroup's culture.

The next factor that facilitates in explaining the online news workgroup is the form of communication used by the staff members. The use of in-person, email and instant messenger communication among the staff in *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom also contributes to defining an online news workgroup. The online news workgroup utilizes these various methods of communication to interact as they perform their daily activities. In the process, they create and develop their own language, acknowledged by the group members.

The following details the role instant messenger plays in the online newsroom as it became a popular method for intra-staff communication.

For six years, the online staff has used the instant messenger tool, in which the producers will login when they arrive to work and enter a private, interoffice chat room. Each has a unique username recognized by each group member. Throughout the day, they will use this tool to joke; interact; share slugs of stories that need to posted, updated or edited; share ideas; and discuss decisions. During this study, members preferred using this venue for communicating in lieu of walking over to a cubicle to talk. As new members join the online staff from the print operation, a copy editor who helps to edit the copy for the website during the day explained that he was getting acclimated to the instant messenger tool since he didn't use it in the print operation. He is located in a separate area of the newsroom near the print staff desks, so using this tool allows him to quickly ask questions and interact with the online staff without having to get up from his desk and walk more than 20 feet to a cubicle on the other side of the newsroom. This tool also allows him to grab the attention of anyone currently working on the website, as the staff will rotate shifts throughout the day, so it can be hard to distinguish who is working when and on what sections of the site. This platform helps the online news workgroup to interact throughout the day and also to establish connections with the print staff when the online staff members are in different locations of the building or the newsroom.

By sharing a common language and similar methods to communicate, *The Chicago Tribune* online news workgroup shares a common way by which to converse, interact and work together in the online newsroom.

The form of communication used in the group work in the *El Norte* newsroom is unique. The staff members share a specific language and set of terms. The form of

communication includes in-person, instant messenger and the telephone. The staff will use a specific language during the daily news production process. It includes terms such as “stories (*notas*),” “meetings(*juntas*),” “investigations (*coberturas*),” “photogalleries (*fotogalerias*),” “videos,” “forums (*foros*),” “video notes (*videonotas*),” and “audio stories (*sonidos*)”. These are just some of the words I heard in the office and appear on the website.

The researcher also heard the terms “tell me (*mande*),” “order me (*anda*),” spoken between colleagues on the phone which means, “to tell me,” or “explain to me what you want.” The staff members also say “check (*cheque*)” for stories when they need to be reviewed.

They also use “multiviewer” when they are using the content management system to access stories. Particularly for the online news workgroup for the homepage, they use the word “zones” to refer to the eight different zones they have on the homepage for moving content around. They will also use “preview (*prevista*),” so the editors can preview a story or a page before they post it.

The online news workgroup rarely uses these terms in the print newspaper or with the print staff. This makes it a unique vernacular and terminology that only the online news staff can understand.

Throughout the day, the online staff members will communicate across email, in person or via instant messenger. They will use these communication vehicles to ask each other to check, to rewrite or to verify stories before posting. Uniquely, the online staff frequently uses instant messenger to communicate more than other methods. The print

newsroom staff does not have the same access to or use of this tool, thus making this communication vehicle special for the online news workgroup.

By sharing a common language and similar methods to communicate, the online news workgroup of *El Norte* has a universal way by which to converse, to interact and to work in the online newsroom.

Fourth, another factor that facilitates to explain the online news workgroup is the virtual or online area where the news artifacts are built and saved in the online newsroom. The artifacts are content management systems; systems for managing reader feedback; wire services; applications for manipulating images, graphics, videos and photos; communication tools like email and instant messenger; and web traffic software. *The Chicago Tribune* online news workgroup works with several forms of content. They work with content from the print staff; they use news budgets for scheduling content for the site; they review emails that update news and other information; they access a content management system to upload and change content for the site; they use tools to create and/or upload videos and photos; they review instructions from a producer guide to know how to make changes or to use the content management system; and they use a whiteboard in the online newsroom for scheduling the news content for the site. These various forms of materials (except the whiteboard) are accessible via an intranet to any producer in the online newsroom, making staff access possible at anytime and in conjunction with another staff member. A common workspace area that *The Chicago Tribune* online news workgroup uses to build and to save their daily and hourly work creates an area unique to the online news workgroup and staff.

The *El Norte* online staff will also share a common virtual workspace area. They receive a story in the multiviewer system from one of the agencies (internal or national) and which they then select and send to the intranet. The online editor then will run a search on the article or by headline or keyword. The story is found and then revised by its headline, summary, et cetera. The online editors will then move the story to a zone on the page and approve it to post to the web. A similar process occurs for the other content management systems that handle photos or videos as well as user-generated content. Throughout the process, the online editors will access these news artifacts and check them for standardization. There is a shared understanding that once the content is in its location for access by the online staff, specific guidelines that must be met for photos, images and other media on the site. For example, there are character restrictions for headlines, sub headlines and briefs that of which the online editors are aware and to which they make adjustments to the news artifacts accordingly. Throughout the process, the online editors of *El Norte* can access the content via an intranet system at the same time as their peers and colleagues, allowing the sharing and contributions by the online news workgroup to be more collaborative.

The last factor that helps to facilitate explaining an online news workgroup is the scheduling of news production. It is a shared activity with a specific timeframe set by the management but also by the nature of the medium (since it's a 24/7 medium). *The Chicago Tribune* online staff works on building the site from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily because of the time in which the volume of Internet traffic to the site is at its highest. This scheduling of the news production process daily allows the staff to orient its work and to have a shared notion of time and deadlines.

The following excerpt specifically details the scheduling for the news production of the homepage of the website. During observations of the newsroom, *The Chicago Tribune* online staff rotated two-hour schedules for the homepage maintenance. This information is posted for staff to access on a webpage so all parties know who is updating the homepage when, a responsibility taken quite seriously by the staff. When someone has this duty, he or she does not like to be bothered or interrupted for any meetings, questions or social interaction. They prefer to have complete concentration on the homepage. They will isolate themselves psychologically from any activity around them. They will ignore interactions and activities around their cubicle and will express their frustration when disturbed or interrupted.

When the online staff is on “the front,” and there is a switch of responsibility from one member to the other, many times the staff members will mention this to each other in-person and also via IM to inform others in the online news workgroup of the “changing of the guard.” In reviewing the 22 records of IM transcripts, the term “the front” was referenced 78 times by the staff. Below are three examples from instant messenger excerpts of how this change of responsibility may be communicated in IM to the online news workgroup staff:

**Example 1:**

producerA(1:05:02 PM): producerB, I can take the front.  
\*\*\*\*  
producerB (1:08:10 PM): ok, it's yours

**Example 2:**

editorA(11:00:47 AM): Let me know when you're done with the front.  
producerA(11:01:07 AM): it's all yours!

### Example 3:

editorA (2:35:15 PM):anybody sposed to take the front now?  
producerA(2:35:27 PM): i am supposed to...  
producerA(2:35:31 PM): you ready for the handover?  
editorA (2:35:38 PM): you want it?  
producerA(2:35:44 PM): ready when you are...  
editorA (2:35:48 PM): you got it  
editorA (2:36:01 PM): nothing much up.  
producerA(2:36:06 PM): it looks like everything is very up to date...  
producerA(2:36:09 PM): thanks

As shown in the three excerpts above (“I can take the front,” “you’re done with the front,” “you ready for the handover,”), the online editors and producers will communicate by asking or by delegating the responsibility of covering the “front” to the next staff member, depending on the assigned scheduling timetable for homepage maintenance for that week.

With a common and shared schedule, the homepage and other areas of the site become an area collaboratively built throughout the day by the online staff. No one individual owns the “front”, but rather the workgroup does. The scheduling of the staff in this online newsroom contributes to a shared notion of time that helps to unite the members of *The Chicago Tribune* online news workgroup and helps them in a collaborative news production process.

As for the *El Norte* online staff, they work daily on building the site from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. since that is their peak of Internet traffic. This scheduling allows the staff to orient its work and its shared notion of time and deadlines.

Overall, the online staff members of *El Norte* work in their various sections of the site from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. daily. This can include editors, designers, videographers, and reporters. There are usually sets of two or more people who are assigned to each section of the website throughout the day in some capacity. This timing sets the schedule of when and how content will be posted. There is a shared understanding of these schedules and how this contributes to the collaborative news production process. The scheduling of the online news workgroup helps define them as a group within *El Norte*.

In summary, this section has answered the first research question of this dissertation of describing the characteristics of the online news workgroup for the two newsrooms. This is based on five factors that include (1) the physical location of the group work in news production, (2) the time of the daily group meetings among the staff, (3) the form of communication used in the group work, (4) the virtual or online location and access of where the group work was saved and worked on, and (5) the time in which the news production occurred. The next section will describe how each newsroom's members of the workgroup collaborate.

#### **4.4 THE CULTURE IN THE NEWSROOM: THE FORM OF COLLABORATION**

The previous section showed how the journalists work in groups and identifies one part of the culture of these two online newsrooms. Another element of the culture in *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* online newsroom is the manner in which the journalists collaborate.

The second question in this investigation is what form of collaboration is employed in the online newsroom? Before answering the form of collaboration that is employed in both online newsrooms, the concept of collaboration must be defined. Collaboration can be defined as “to work together, especially in some literary or scientific undertaking,” (Webster’s New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2002, p.118). The use of the word collaboration as yet is not that prevalent in journalism scholarship (Chan, 2002; Bruns, 2005). Chan (2002) and Bruns (2005) describe collaboration from the perspective of the news organization working externally with the reader instead of the collaboration within the news organization. In this study, the focus is on the collaboration within the news organization itself, specifically among the online news workgroup. Thus, the study’s definition of collaborative news production is the process of activities that the journalists in the online newsroom that have global, shared team and configural team conditions that help collaboration to occur.

#### **4.4.1 Major Findings of *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte***

Considering the concept of collaboration defined above, *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* online newsrooms demonstrated a varying form of collaboration. This finding helps to support the argument in the last chapter that news production can be collaborative, based on the methods of analysis for media routines. The online newsroom is collaborative as determined by the kind of group work done in news production on an hourly and a daily basis. This is demonstrated through the use of 1) shared artifacts in the newsroom, 2) shared responsibilities, and 3) a shared understanding of what is considered a news event for posting on the site. Each of these three factors will be discussed next.

First, the online newsroom staff of *The Chicago Tribune* uses many artifacts in the news production process. As mentioned earlier, the artifacts are content management systems; systems for managing reader feedback; wire services; applications for manipulating images, graphics, videos and photos; communication tools like email and instant messenger; and web traffic software. On a daily basis, the newsroom staff will use these artifacts interchangeably. The following details specifics of the news artifacts and how they are used.

In particular, the online staff of *The Chicago Tribune* has an addictive activity of checking the site traffic tool to see how well received are sections of the site, as gauged by the number of page views and clicks. They check this tool often to see how certain stories and headlines are faring with the news audience. Some of the online staff members regaled the about the addictiveness of checking the traffic on the site. Another

artifact with particular importance is an asset inventory list distributed nightly by one of the producers that lists all the additional pieces that accompany stories such as audio, photos, video, etc. The next day, the staff members consult this email to discern what if any missing pieces they need to add. There is no specific instruction given as to who should complete the assets, as it is a shared and collaborative task among the online newsroom staff. All of the online staff is familiar with the process and knows that it is just another part of the website's content that needs to be updated and monitored, so it is a routine activity accepted by the online staff members. Depending on who is scheduled and what his or her responsibilities may be for the next day, an online staff member will address the asset list accordingly. No one claims specific ownership to the task, as the person completing the task changes as dictated by on schedules and by workload. Since its inception earlier in 2007, the staff has come to depend on this email. Below is an excerpt from one asset list one day in August 2007. On the list, each line (i.e. chi-familysecrets-items) represents a slug or code for where and how the story is saved in the content management system so the online staff member can easily locate the story. Above the slugs are headings for particular story topics (i.e. MILLER BEACH) that reference multiple stories or assets (videos represented as wn, photogalleries, etc.) that should supplement the main story. For example, the Miller Beach heading shows two items for it - a story represented by the html extension (chi-070826millerbeach-html), and the other is a video represented by a wn extension (chi-070826millerbeach-wn).

-----Original Message-----

**From:** \*\*\*\*

**Sent:** Sunday, August 26, 2007 8:20 PM

**To:** \*\*\*\*

**Subject:** Asset inventory for 8/27

FAMILY SECRETS

chi-familysecrets-items

MILLER BEACH

chi-070826millerbeach-html

chi-070826millerbeach-wn

FLOODS

chi-storms-items

Everything you need is in there.

OTHER FLOOD ASSETS

chi-070822localflood-photogallery

chi-070823storm-photogallery

Interactive damage tracker: chi-stormtracker-07-htmlpage

Share your photos: chi-070823tornado-ugcpc

Tell your stories: chi-070824stormforum-storylink

Bucket: chi-severeweathervideo-wn

\*\*\*\*names omitted.

As these examples demonstrate, the use and access of these news artifacts in *The Chicago Tribune* allows for collaboration amongst the members of the online news workgroup to occur through the natural activities of daily news production.

At *El Norte*, the online newsroom staff uses a variety of artifacts in the news production process. The staff will use a content management system that allows the online news workgroup to open the same story on two different computers simultaneously and permit two editors to view and make changes accordingly. This sharing contributes to the collaborative processes in this newsroom. In addition, the

online news workgroup will access wires and other content management systems (such as the photo content management system) to upload content to the site. These special systems are available on an intranet accessible to the online editors at any time, allowing them to share between web sections and the print news staff accordingly.

These examples demonstrate the type of artifacts the *El Norte* staff utilizes on a daily basis in the newsroom and how these artifacts are understood as part of the news production process. The *El Norte* online news workgroup is aware these artifacts are developing items and how they are shared among each other.

The second factor that demonstrates the form of collaborative work done in the online newsroom is the understanding and the responsibility the online staff has for posting news to the website. At *The Chicago Tribune*, the responsibility, particularly for the homepage, is not assigned to one individual, but rather to the whole staff, allowing it to be a shared responsibility among the group and reinforcing the team mentality.

The researcher noticed an interesting team effort between the online editor and online producer at *The Chicago Tribune* in which they tag-teamed the homepage for a Paris Hilton story. The editor asked the producer about modifying the layout, expressing his desire to change it and asked the producer to edit the homepage layout while he himself was working on the section. So this partner activity entails two people instead of only one. It worked out well and they changed the format of the front top portion of the page to have a layout that would accommodate another story on the top of the page. One staff member could not have completed this task without collaborative effort because the system blocks the ability of one person to change the layout template of content (i.e. creation of spaces for one or multiple stories with or without images to be featured on the

top of the page) on the page while changing the actual content (i.e. changing or adding new headlines) on the homepage , and it requires two people to login into the system and make the dual change simultaneously.

The following excerpt details how seriously the online editor views the responsibility of monitoring the front page, which he reiterates with his staff on a daily basis. He also acknowledges how much this responsibility takes his staff away from exploration and experimentation with other projects over the course of day.

We program the homepage. We are responsible for making sure it's the best that it can be at any given moment. So that's Job 1 to go to a system that people are responsible for the page for longer periods of time, and they're under orders not to be distracted. I think we've kind of got in a bad habit of maybe trying to multitask while we're running the homepage, which sort of evolved to the point where you can't really do that anymore. You've got to focus like a laser beam on it.

This shared responsibility of the homepage among the online newsroom staff at *The Chicago Tribune* demonstrates how they work together to build the website hour-by-hour without one individual having specific ownership over the area of the site. The task of attending the homepage requires one person, but the responsibility will rotate from one staff member to another as the day progresses. The collaboration stems from the changing of the responsibility of this task from one staff member to another and the webpage that becomes compiled content from the various staff members throughout the day. This contributes to creating an environment at *The Chicago Tribune* that supports collaborative work and thus a news production process that is not an assembly-line, but rather more collaborative and shared.

At *El Norte*, the online newsroom staff members work collaboratively in that they understand and respect the responsibility they bear for posting news to the website. They place importance on accuracy first, rather than being speedy. Following this, they place importance on the standards, such as character limits for headlines. Character limits for headlines are required because the content management system utilized by the online news workgroup places a limit on how many words can appear in a headline and brief on the webpage. This reduction in characters and words can make a headline difficult to write while assuring the presentation of the story's main premise in the fewest words possible. As a result, the online staff of *El Norte* must make sure not only that their headlines are accurate, but also concise to fit in the area allotted.

For example, the researcher observed the online editor who manages the state and regional section of the website. As he was updating the stories on the page, he was following the standards mentioned above. He was careful of his accuracy when posting headlines, but he also verified they fit into the character limitations and avoided repeating words from other headlines. The researcher also observed the homepage editor, who she followed the same guidelines as she received content to post. She paid careful attention to how she worded the headline so that the information was clear but also spent time modifying the headline to fit the character constraints. In some cases, the researcher watched her and other editors insert random letters in the headline area of the content management system to judge how many more characters they had left in the headline field before they finished writing the headline and posting it. In this case, the online editors were aware of their responsibility to accuracy on the website as well as to the adherence to a set of technical standards.

The following interview excerpt from the editor who oversees the *El Norte* online staff states what motivates his employees daily in the newsroom to work and how this ties to a shared responsibility for what is considered news and information.

Pues algo que tenemos aquí... a favor en 'El Norte.com' es que podemos saber de inmediato la reacción de nuestros lectores, a diferencia de, de la edición impresa; por ejemplo, tenemos la promoción de 'Gánate los libros de Harry Potter' y de inmediato podemos saber que están entrando a participar lectores y que si y... y que entraron en, en una hora trescientas personas a, a contestar la 'trivia'.... 'Tu espacio', donde los lectores mandan su fotos o videos, también vemos de inmediato la, la, la respuesta, entonces... O el poner una nota, el elegir una nota y saber que después se pone en lo más visto, yo creo que eso es motivante saber que estás dando en el, como decimos, en el clavo, o sea, que estás siendo... tomando buenas, buenas decisiones, y ... pues ver la misma temática, o sea, ver de inmediato, algo que tú, el trabajo que tú haces verlo de inmediato publicado... creo que eso es una buena, una buena motivación para, para el equipo ¿no? (Editorial Coordinator of ElNorte.com, personal communication, July 2007)

[Well, we have something here...in favor of El Norte.com is that we know immediately the reaction of our readers, in contrast to the print edition, for example, we are promoting 'You can win Harry Potter books' Immediately we know that they are going to participate...that 300 readers participate in one hour to answer the 'trivia'.... 'Your space,' is where readers send their photos or videos and we also see immediately, the answer, then... Or we put a story on the site, choose a story and know by looking at the most viewed module on the site its performance. I think it is motivating to know that you are giving, as we say, hitting it on the nail, or you are....taking good, good decisions and therefore see the same subject, or see immediately, something that you, the work you do see immediately released... I think this is a good, a good motivation to, for the team right? (Editorial Coordinator of ElNorte.com, personal communication, July 2007)]

This interview excerpt shows how seriously the staff members of *El Norte* treat their responsibility of posting content. They know the audience reaction to the information they post on the site and receive immediate feedback to their decisions, an option unavailable to their print counterpart. This gives them a greater chance to know their audience and their readers, and to grasp what their needs and their expectations.

This relates to their daily news production tasks and to the role of collaboration required among the *El Norte* online news workgroup throughout the day.

The final factor contributing to the form of collaboration among the online news workgroup is based on a common understanding among the group members of what represents a news event that should be posted to the site. This may be explained through the form of breaking news or a major news event.

At *The Chicago Tribune*, the online staff moves content the website throughout the day. In most cases, this content is based on what the print staff is producing. In the case of news not yet been written by the print staff, the online news workgroup relies on wires to create new content for the site. Key events that drive most of the daily content include press conferences, scheduled events, accidents and crime. Despite these re-occurring events that transpire day in and day out, year in and year out, the newsroom still seems just as energized and positive about their role in documenting these news events for the public consumption as if they were happening for the first time.

This understanding of what embodies a news event for the website contributes to the collaboration among *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom staff in the daily news production process. Not only is this shared understanding is a characteristic of the work culture in this newsroom group but also it reflects a form of activity that requires the members of the online staff to have the same levels of journalistic training and of judgment as to what is newsworthy and what should be posted on the website or not.

At *El Norte*, the online newsroom staff has a common understanding regarding what makes news based on their journalistic training and background. In addition to

receiving news content from the wires and their own content management system, the online staff will frequent their sister website, *Reforma.com* to see what content they have either to pull similar content for their own devices or to notice an error and inform the staff at *Reforma* accordingly. By viewing the sister paper and by deciding whether to adjust their news agenda in accordance with their sister paper demonstrates what the staff understands as a news event at a larger media organization level as part of their daily routine.

The *El Norte* online newsroom staff also is aware of news conferences and how they contribute to the plans of the news schedule for the day. Many times the researcher observed the staff members becoming aware of a news conference given by the local or national government and they would prepare accordingly. The online news workgroup acknowledges and understands these conferences as part of the posted news events. Aside from general news events, accidents and catastrophic situations also are acknowledged by the staff as newsworthy and they know how to glean what is appropriate to put on the news site.

This section has answered this dissertation's second research question by defining the extent of collaboration in these two newsrooms based on three factors. These include the use of 1) shared artifacts in the newsroom, 2) shared responsibilities, and 3) a shared understanding of what is considered newsworthy for posting on the site. These factors help to provide another definition of the culture of these two online newsrooms. The next section will describe how members of the workgroup collaborate in the news production process at both newsrooms.

#### **4.5 THE CULTURE IN THE NEWSROOM: COLLABORATIVE TRAITS OF THE ONLINE NEWS PRODUCTION PROCESS**

Another part of describing the culture of the newsroom is how journalists work together to get work done. The third question of this dissertation asks: what are the collaborative traits of the online news production process? As described earlier, the news production process is how the online journalists (editors, designers, producers, and reporters) move content (text, video, audio, photos, graphics, and multimedia) to the website as part of the news production process. This next section details the observations of how each newsroom's workgroups collaborate when posting news to the website.

##### **4.5.1 Major Findings: *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte***

The connection between collaboration and the news production process is facilitated by several factors. They include 1) the virtual or online location and access of where group work is executed and then saved, 2) the form of communication used in the workgroup, and 3) the way in which news artifacts are treated as developing items. The combination of these three factors shows the flexibility among the workgroup members in their daily tasks, a shared venue for communication, and that news artifacts are not owned by one particular individual but shared among the group. Thus, these factors demonstrate a form of collaboration between each member of the group and the group as a whole in the news production process. These findings contribute to the argument mentioned in the last chapter that the hierarchical structure of the gatekeeper can be

removed from the news process to a gatewatcher in the newsroom where collaborative processes are more likely to receive support (Bruns, 2005).

At *The Chicago Tribune*, the online staff members access news artifacts constantly throughout the day and this virtual location is a common workspace that allows any member in the staff to access this virtual and online area at the same time anywhere in the newsroom and/or building to build the website and to guide the flow of news production throughout the day.

The content management system they utilize pulls content from the wires and from their print counterpart so they can easily manage, organize and post the content they receive. At any time, they can access a story, add a multimedia element such as a photogallery or related stories and upload it to the site within minutes. They also can change headlines and briefs on the fly as news develops and requires modifications. This content management system is customizable and complex for the ways in which the producers work with the content and how they position it on the website in a manner they see fit. At any given moment in time, any producer in the online newsroom can access a story or piece of content and multiple producers can contribute to the process.

This common content management system area allows *The Chicago Tribune* online news workgroup to have a virtual workspace area where group members can share the activities and tasks in the process of news production regardless of where the online staff members physically are in the newsroom or the building. This creates an environment in which the collaboration among the online staff is more likely.

At *El Norte*, a common workspace area is formed by the location where the staff members simultaneously access and share news artifacts as part of the news production process. In observing the day-to-day operations of the online news workgroup, the editors of the homepage will access the page in tandem via the content management system. This allows the online news workgroup members to share the news artifacts with which they are working, to make changes or corrections, and to work together in making decisions on where and how the news content should be posted. They easily can open the same content at the same time on multiple computers, thus facilitating a collaborative news production process.

The second factor that facilitates collaboration among the online news workgroup members is the form of communication they use. *The Chicago Tribune* online staff uses in-person, email and instant messenger to communicate in their daily activities, particularly for making judgments and selections for content that will be posted on the site.

In the excerpt of an instant messenger chat below, a bank heist occurred in the early morning (around 10 a.m.) and an online news workgroup of two editors, one journalist and one producer moved quickly to get as many facts in the fewest minutes possible to post a brief sentence description on the website (“Armed robber barricaded inside bank,”) and to send an email alert to readers regarding the breaking story. Within 20 minutes, by 10:33 a.m., information was sent to readers via email (“Police are at a Far North Side bank this morning where an armed robber was barricaded inside, and where employees might be present, Chicago police said.”) and posted on the website.

editorA (10:12:55 AM): journalistA making calls on possible hostage situation at bank in 7000 block of n. clark st. \*\*\*\* has been dispatched.

\*\*\*\*

editorB (10:14:48 AM): nbc5: BREAKING NEWS: Gunman Holed Up In Rogers Park Bank Chicago police are at the scene of an apparent standoff with a man in a North Side bank.

journalistA (10:14:58 AM): 6900 block of North Clark Street, bank robbery in progress, that's all we got, nothing substantial.

editorB (10:15:22 AM): gimme a sentence asap

editorB (10:15:28 AM): for bn overline\*\*

editorA (10:15:35 AM): agreed.

journalistA (10:17:36 AM): Got it confirmed.

journalistA (10:17:40 AM): from district sgt.

\*\*\*\*

producerA (10:21:24 AM): I'm sending the alert, so make sure I get those first few sentences, y'all

\*\*\*\*

editorA (10:22:49 AM): i'm editing standoff.

editorA (10:26:23 AM): STANDOFF is in copyeditor. I'll make template to save time; tell me when it's ready.

producerA (10:26:43 AM): Would you be able to shoot a couple sentences so I can work on the alert?

editorA (10:27:05 AM): yes. standby.

editorA (10:27:40 AM): Police are at a Far North Side bank this morning where an armed robber was barricaded inside, and where employees might be present, Chicago police said.

producerA (10:27:54 AM): thx

editorA (10:29:50 AM): chi-070830bank is ready to go.

producerA (10:30:08 AM): Subject

producerA (10:30:11 AM): Armed robber barricaded inside bank

producerA (10:30:17 AM): Police are at a Far North Side bank this morning where an armed robber was barricaded inside, and where employees might be present, Chicago police said.

editorB (10:30:47 AM): it's in the bn overline

producerA (10:33:26 AM): Alert sent

\*Instant messenger names changed to protect identity of the individuals in this study

\*\* Means breaking news overline, a headline that appears at the very top of the homepage below the main navigation when breaking news occurs.

\*\*\*\*other conversations among online newsroom staff have been omitted for focus on the specific excerpt only.

The use of in-person, email and instant messenger communication among the online news workgroup at *The Chicago Tribune* demonstrates the common methods by which the staff can communicate information related to daily news production activities. The example above demonstrates how the online news workgroup used the instant messenger platform to describe the breaking news event, to prepare a breaking news statement for the website and the information needed for an email alert. Within 20 minutes, the online news workgroup worked together to provide a general overview of what was happening on the North Side of the city. This platform allowed the online news workgroup to make quick decisions regarding the wording of the information for the email alert and the website. The platform also provided the online news workgroup, as an entity, valuable information regarding the breaking story (i.e. where the event was located and how the online news workgroup could access it as changes developed). This common method of communication contributes to a shared area where *The Chicago Tribune* online news workgroup interacts, makes decisions, and collaborates during the daily news production process.

At *El Norte*, the online news workgroup uses instant messenger to interact, to converse and to make decisions on their content. Email communication also is part of the news production process. The following excerpt details how the designers create the online animated infographics for the website. During observations in the newsroom, two of the designers who work on animated infographics for the website received emails of information for an infographic from a particular editor for the site. Over the course of four to five hours, the editor and the designer communicated via email about the layout for an infographic of a soccer game between Argentina and Mexico for the website.

Often, the designers will receive emails of detailed information rather than a storyboard or a drawing of the suggested infographic lay out. In many cases, the editors leave the visual aspect of the animated infographic up to the designers. Below is an excerpt of three emails in one day (Mon, 9 Jul 2007 17:18:07; Mon, 9 Jul 2007 19:47; Mon, 9 Jul 2007 21:23) between an online news workgroup of designers and editors on this project.

**From:** \*\*\*\*\*  
**Date:** Mon, 9 Jul 2007 17:18:07 -0500  
**To:** \*\*\*\*\*  
**Conversation:** GRÁFICO MÉXICO VS. ARGENTINA  
**Subject:** GRÁFICO MÉXICO VS. ARGENTINA

Hola.  
Les pedimos de su ayuda para llevar de hoy para mañana un gráfico de un comparativo entre la nómina de Argentina contra la de México, desglosado en cada jugador. Serían tres botones, Intro, México y Argentina:

**BOTÓN Intro**  
México y Argentina se verán las caras en las Semifinales de la Copa América...

**BOTÓN México**  
10 millones de dólares  
Rafael Márquez 3 millones de dólares  
Nery Castillo...

----- End of Forwarded Message

----- Forwarded Message

**From:** \*\*\*\*\*  
**Date:** Mon, 9 Jul 2007 19:47:42 -0500  
**To:** \*\*\*\*\*  
**Cc:** \*\*\*\*\*  
**Conversation:** INFO GRÁFICO MÉXICO VS. ARGENTINA  
**Subject:** INFO GRÁFICO MÉXICO VS. ARGENTINA  
\*\*\*\*\*.

Aquí te paso los titulares de las dos selecciones y cómo se paran en la cancha. En un rato más te envío lo que cuestan. Si lo quieres ver mejor en papel aquí lo tengo, sólo dime y te lo paso.

Voy a empezar a notificar las fotos de los 22 jugadores y también te las envío cuando las termine.

Saludos.

**ARGENTINA**

\*Roberto Abbondanzieri

\*Roberto Ayala

\*Gabriel Heinze

\*Javier Zanetti

\*Gabriel Milito

\*Juan Sebastián Verón \*Javier Mascherano \*Esteban Cambiasso

\*Juan Román Riquelme

\*Lionel Messi

\*Carlos Tévez

---

\*Nery Castillo

\*Juan Carlos Cacho

\*Andrés Guardado

\*Fernando Arce

\*Gerardo Torrado

\*Jaime Correa

\*Fausto Pinto

\*Israel Castro

\*Jonny Magallón

\*Rafael Márquez

\*Oswaldo Sánchez

**MÉXICO**

----- Forwarded Message

**From:** \*\*\*\*\*

**Date:** Mon, 9 Jul 2007 21:23:41 -0500

**To:** \*\*\*\*\*

**Cc:** \*\*\*\*\*

**Conversation:** KICKERS E INTROS GRÁFICO MÉXICO VS. ARGENTINA

**Subject:** KICKERS E INTROS GRÁFICO MÉXICO VS. ARGENTINA

\*\*\*\*\*.

Este texto es lo que llevaría print, igual y te puede servir.

Para el Botón de México

Kicker:

RAFA, A LA EUROPEA

Intro:

Rafael Márquez es, sin duda, el jugador más caro de la Selección Nacional. Si alguien quiere comprárselo al Barcelona le costará 16.3 millones de dólares, pero si Barza no lo desea vender, el club interesado tendría que pagarle a los blaugrana 125 millones de dólares, que es en lo que está tasada su cláusula de rescisión.

----- End of Forwarded Message

[ English Translation Follows]

**From:** \*\*\*\*\*  
**Date:** Mon, 9 Jul 2007 17:18:07 -0500  
**To:** \*\*\*\*\*  
**Conversation:** Graphic Mexico vs. Argentina  
**Subject:** Graphic Mexico vs. Argentina

Hi,  
We are asking your help today for preparing a graphic for tomorrow that compares the roster of Mexico against Argentina broken down by each player. There will be three buttons: Intro, Mexico and Argentina:

Introduction Button:  
México and Argentina will meet face to face in the American Cup Semifinals...

Mexico Button:  
10 million dollars  
Rafael Márquez 3 million dollars  
Nery Castillo...  
.....

----- Forwarded Message

**From:** \*\*\*\*\*  
**Date:** Mon, 9 Jul 2007 19:47:42 -0500  
**To:** \*\*\*\*\*  
**Cc:** \*\*\*\*\*  
**Conversation:** Infographic Mexico vs. Argentina  
**Subject:** Infographic Mexico vs. Argentina

\*\*\*\*.  
Here I am giving you the national teams and how they will play in the game. In a while, I will send you more. If you want to see it in print, tell me and I'll give it to you. I am going to start to identify the photos of the 22 players and send them to you when I am done.  
Cheers.

**ARGENTINA**

\*Roberto Abbondanzieri  
\*Roberto Ayala

\*Gabriel Heinze

\*Javier Zanetti

\*Gabriel Milito

\*Juan Sebastián Verón \*Javier Mascherano \*Esteban Cambiasso

\*Juan Román Riquelme

\*Lionel Messi

\*Carlos Tévez

---

\*Nery Castillo                      \*Juan Carlos Cacho  
\*Andrés Guardado                      \*Fernando Arce  
  \*Gerardo Torrado  
  \*Jaime Correa  
\*Fausto Pinto                      \*Israel Castro  
\*Jonny Magallón                      \*Rafael Márquez  
  \*Oswaldo Sánchez  
  **MÉXICO**

----- Forwarded Message

**From:** \*\*\*\*\*

**Date:** Mon, 9 Jul 2007 21:23:41 -0500

**To:** \*\*\*\*\*

**Cc:** \*\*\*\*\*

**Conversation:** Kickers and Intros Graphic México vs. Argentina

**Subject:** Kickers and Intros Graphic México vs. Argentina

\*\*\*\*\*

This text is what will go in print, it should serve you well.  
For the México Button

Kicker:

Rafe, The European

Intro:

Rafael Márquez is without a doubt, the most expensive player in the national selection. If anyone wants to buy him from Barcelona, it will cost 16.3 million dollars, but if Barza does not sell, the club would have to pay 125 million dollars, which is mentioned in the termination clause.

----- End of Forwarded Message

As the email excerpt shows, during a five to six hour time span, the designers and editors communicated via email on how best to develop and to present an interactive infographic that would appear on the website and in the print newspaper the next day. The first email excerpt presents information on the infographic layout and buttons that includes an Introduction, information on Argentina and Mexico. The second email excerpt details information on how the infographic should be laid out by the soccer

players for each country, their position on the soccer field and how each player's name is a link to more information. The third email excerpt is about the information that goes with each soccer player in the infographic. This form of communication of emails allows for the collaboration between the online news workgroup of designers and editors as part of the news production process.

The next factor that facilitates the collaboration among the members in the online news workgroup is how they use several artifacts (i.e. content management systems for uploading stories and multimedia) in the building of the website hourly and daily. At *The Chicago Tribune*, these artifacts are treated as developing items that are constantly being changed, being edited, being updated or having items added to them. As a result, this form of developing news artifacts makes the news production process more collaborative in that the online news workgroup members each have the shared responsibility of accessing these artifacts and of changing them accordingly. The following instant messenger excerpt details how the artifacts become developing items in the online news production process at *The Chicago Tribune*.

This instant messenger excerpt detailed below is about a developing story of a major storm that descended upon the metropolitan area of the city during the mid-afternoon (12-4 p.m. timeframe) and left considerable damage in its wake. This example shows how much one story (referred to below as storms and weathermain) evolved over a period of two hours between an online news workgroup of a copyeditor, three editors, and two producers.

copyeditorA (3:24:25 PM): STORMS is updated, being put into System\* by \*\*\*\*. hed, lede stay same.

editorA (3:26:48 PM): chi-070824weathermain-story is updated.  
\*\*\*\*

copyeditorA (3:42:57 PM): It doesn't appear that the storm photo gallery is related to the main weather story. chi-070823storm-photogallery

editorC (3:52:41 PM): Is now

copyeditorA (3:53:06 PM): Great. Thanks.

producerA (3:53:42 PM): Going into chi-070824weathermain-story if that's okay

editorC (3:57:02 PM): Photo has been added to: chi-070824weathermain-story

copyeditorA (3:57:48 PM): got it.

editorC (3:57:59 PM): Thanks.

copyeditorA (3:57:59 PM): also POD thumbnail photo is done.

editorC (3:58:49 PM): thanks again

copyeditorA (3:59:23 PM): no problem. the copy desk is coming in and helping with flood gallery.

copyeditorA (4:01:02 PM): producerA, can i go into the WEATHERMAIN?

producerA (4:01:53 PM): yes

copyeditorA (4:01:54 PM): thank you.

\*\*\*\*

editorA (4:30:26 PM): the main weather story was becoming a long mess, so copyeditorA and I decided to try breaking it up with multiple subheads? What do people think? I can switch it back if need be.

\*\*\*\*

producerA (4:33:26 PM): I would advise making them smaller

producerA (4:33:37 PM): Just bolding them at the regular size would be fine, I think

copyeditorA (4:34:14 PM): Let's try a smaller size first.

\*\*\*\*

editorA (4:38:20 PM): i changed the subheds, producerA. Thanks.

producerA (4:39:40 PM): Sure

\*\*\*\*

producerA (5:38:04 PM): I missed the update on the weather main story,

producerA (5:38:33 PM): pop a note in here when it updates

producerB (5:43:42 PM): journalistA has just finished a ComEd numbers update, which I've eyed and is now being shipped to \*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*

\*Instant messenger names changed to protect identity of the individuals in this study  
\*\*\*\*other conversations among online newsroom staff have been omitted for focus on the specific excerpt only.

This example demonstrates how the online news workgroup of *The Chicago Tribune* compiled a news story that was not static but rather developing throughout the day. As a result, additional information and resources were able to be included with the story as provided by different members of the online news workgroup. As this example shows, no one specifically owned the story. It was a collaborative effort between the members of the online news workgroup.

At *El Norte*, the online news workgroup used several artifacts in the hourly and daily building of the website. These artifacts are treated as developing items because they are constantly being changed, being edited, being updated or having items added to them. Another factor that contributes to this notion of the developing news artifact in this newsroom is the internal agency (news wire agency inside the news organization) that types up the reports relayed from the reporters from the field. As a result, this form of developing news artifacts makes the news production process more collaborative because the online news workgroup members each have the shared responsibility of accessing these artifacts and uploading them to the site as updates occurs.

The following excerpt details how the agency and reporters work with the online news workgroup to get content to the site. The freshness and updates required for the stories is an important part of the process among the reporters, the agency and the online news workgroup. During one day of observation with a political reporter, he attended a press conference at the local government offices (for the state of Nuevo Leon) for the announcement of a replacement of a government official as Secretary General. As soon as the press conference ended, the political reporter called the agency and gave the words verbatim that he wanted the agency to give to the online staff to post. He then called his

boss to inform him of what was happening. Then, typically, the agency will write the story and, shortly thereafter, the online news workgroup will pull the story from the system and upload it to the site.

This small “agency” of 6 people is in the same area with the online editors and they take dictations from field reporters via telephone or email. This agency works neither as part of the online workgroup nor as part of the print operation but they are a separate entity in and of themselves within the news organization. They do this every day and have a schedule of which reporters are covering what story and when to expect a report. The agency writers have a story title, the reporter, the date and the story that the input into the system. They also have a ranking system to identify whether the information came from the field via telephone, from an email from the field, or if the reporter physically returned to the office and then emailed the report to the agency. They submit this to a content management system from which the online news staff pulls and edits the story before posting it to the content management system.

This form of communication between the reporter, the agency and the online news staff is significant for the newsroom and is a consistent practice that the researcher observed in the newsroom. According to the editor who manages the *El Norte* online staff, members offer monthly incentives (i.e. money) to the reporters if reporters call in their stories or if they email them from the field. This provides reporters with the motive to call and to call often. This partnership shows a level of importance that the company has placed on having developing stories communicated back to the newsroom as quickly as possible for the print and the online newspapers.

Another example of how the news artifacts are treated as developing items includes the focus on a website fresh with news. One of the online editors updates the website every couple of hours during his shift with new information or a new photo when news may be slow. He does not like to see the same news stagnant on the site for many hours and will work hard to make sure the page looks fresh and updated while at the same time maintaining accuracy and integrity in the material posted.

These examples demonstrate how the news artifact in the newsroom is developing since the *El Norte* staff members implement the “agency” practice for their reporters and the online editors place much significance on making sure the website is updated minute by minute with the latest information and news. The collaboration in working with these developing new artifacts is necessary in order to obtain the content as it occurs and as it develops on the site.

The last section answered the third research question in this dissertation and described how collaboration is facilitated by the online journalists in the news production process at both newsrooms. These collaborative traits included 1) the virtual or online location and access of where group work is worked on and then, 2) the form of communication used in the workgroup, and 3) the way in which news artifacts are treated as developing items. These three factors helped to provide another definition of the culture for *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* online newsrooms. The next section will describe to what degree the journalists work together or work individually as they produce news for the website as well as if they communicate with each other implicitly or explicitly during the news production process.

#### 4.6 THE CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION IN THE NEWSROOM: HOFSTEDE AND HALL APPLIED.

Communication Schema	Culture Schema
High context	Collectivism
Low Context	Individualism

Figure 4.1: Hofstede and Hall schema combined

Based on the schema addressed in the last chapter (as shown in Figure 4.1 above), the fourth question in this investigation relates to what degree is the online newsroom a collectivistic or individualistic culture? A low-or high-context communication culture? *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* online newsrooms, as Triandis described it, best represent a combination of a collectivistic and individualistic culture. In this investigation, *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom demonstrated forms of a collectivistic and individualistic culture; however, the degree or the intensity of the individualistic culture was more obvious through the way in which the online staff members behaved and interacted with each other. While the *El Norte* online newsroom demonstrated forms of both cultures, the degree or intensity of a collectivistic culture was more obvious through the way the online staff members behaved and interacted with each other. In addition, applying the framework of Hall (1976) of high-and low-context communication culture, *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom demonstrated elements of

both communication forms, but presented a larger degree or intensity of the low-context communication culture. The *El Norte* online newsroom demonstrated both communication forms but the researcher observed a larger degree and intensity of the high-context communication culture. Details of these findings follow in this next section.

#### **4.6.1 Major Findings: *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte***

In the case of *The Chicago Tribune*, the online newsroom has individualistic and low-context communication characteristics whereas for *El Norte*, the online newsroom has collectivistic and high-context communication characteristics. These characteristics can be demonstrated through specific observations made at both newsrooms. These include 1) the form of communication used in the group, 2) the amount of statements that referenced “I” versus “we”, 3) the ways in which the group identified themselves as a group or other, and 4) the forms of interaction that occurred in the newsroom. Each of these observations will now be discussed.

The forms of communication used in the online news workgroup of *The Chicago Tribune* support the characteristic of a low-context communication culture in the newsroom. This is demonstrated through the short and abbreviated interactions among the online news workgroup members, frequently embodied in the messages exchanged by instant messenger.

This excerpt that follows enumerates how the use of instant messenger influences a short form of communication that is abrupt and straightforward. In this excerpt, a developing story during the day concerned a family mysteriously found dead in an SUV

outside of the Chicago area. The police held a press conference to describe the crime scene and the investigation. This excerpt details how, in an hour, the online news workgroup of two rewrite editors, a journalist, an editor, two producers, and one copyeditor quickly worked together to post the most current, updated information on the site through a fast and direct manner.

rewrite editorB (10:58:24 AM): 15-20 more minutes for news conference. they're waiting for state's atty.

journalistA (11:02:56 AM): guys was treated and released from hospital

\*\*\*\*

EditorA (11:05:01 AM): Should copyeditor A backread the photogallery?

ProducerB (11:05:21 AM): if she is available, that would be good

EditorA (11:05:27 AM): just got your email...I'll see copyeditor A

rewrite editorB (11:05:52 AM): CHANNAHON updated with neighbor saying she heard shots last night and hospital saying man was treated and released into police custody

EditorA (11:06:53 AM): copyeditor A's handling gallery and will send a note to ctweb when ready

CopyEditorA (11:07:24 AM): i'm in the gallery

\*\*\*\*

CopyEditorA (11:21:28 AM): channahon photogallery is done

\*\*\*\*

EditorA (11:24:38 AM): A second photobox: chi-channahon2-photobox has been created if wanted at some point--shot of blue-tarped SUV being removed via flatbed truck

ProducerB (11:25:50 AM): copyeditor A, what's the slug?

ProducerA (11:26:05 AM): news conference officially starting now.

ProducerA (11:28:30 AM): producerB... if it ends during dayparting, can you please remove from bno?

ProducerB (11:28:49 AM): sure

ProducerA (11:28:53 AM): thanks.

Copyeditor A (11:28:59 AM): the slug is chi-channahon-photogallery

Rewrite editorB (11:34:53 AM): CHNNAHON updated with ages of women, sex and ages of

dead children. \*\*\*\*

EditorA (11:53:32 AM): ok if I go in and add photogallery to story?

journalistA (11:53:40 AM): hold for one sec

journalistA (11:53:43 AM): rewrite editorA is in there

ProducerB (11:54:01 AM): no objection

EditorA (11:54:12 AM): let me know when it's ok  
journalistA (11:54:29 AM): ok, rewrite editorA will let you know when she's out  
journalistA (11:54:43 AM): she was making a couple changes  
rewrite editorA (11:56:06 AM): i'm still in there. hold on a sec.

\*\*\*\*

rewrite editorA (11:58:42 AM): EditorA, you can go into chi-070614channahon-homicides to add the gallery.

rewrite editorA (11:58:48 AM): Will you let me know when you're out?

EditorA (11:59:08 AM): done, thanks.

\*Instant messenger names changed to protect identity of the individuals in this study  
\*\*\*\*other conversations among online newsroom staff have been omitted for focus on the specific excerpt

This example is one of several observed in *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom among the online news workgroup members that reveals how they communicate in short statements of one-to four-word phrases (i.e. “i’m in the gallery,” “what’s the slug,” “hold for one sec”) to each other via instant messenger. This method allows them to make tasks, such as updating or correcting information on the site, flow efficiently by quickly posting statements to the chat room so that their group members can take action without confusion because the text clearly shows what task or action is required as the news production process moves along (i.e. if a word or letter needs to be changed or if someone needs to enter a section of the site such as “ok if I go in and add photogallery to story?”). As shown, the online news workgroup was able to clarify information and to provide details to the whole group of where in the updating process the story was. This form of abbreviated, direct communication without much meaning (i.e. “hold for one sec”) reflects characteristics of Hall’s (1976) low-context communication culture as shown in the table of attributes in the second chapter (See Table 2.2) .The online news workgroup members can join this chat room discussion at

any time and know what story is being worked on and what is being done to it without having to decipher any codes or need additional background information to understand the status quo.

At *El Norte*, the type of communication the members of the online news workgroup use are based on in-person, email and instant messenger platforms. These various methods of communication allow the online news workgroup to interact and to make decisions on news production decisions.

In-person communication is used frequently among the homepage staff members when they want to discuss a particular story and where it should be placed. This is tied closely to their use of instant messenger when they want to check the spelling and wording of a headline and brief that will appear on the site.

They will use the phone when they need to reach a person in another department, (ex. sports) to clarify or to correct a headline or brief that appears on the homepage. Or they will use the phone to call their sister paper, *Reforma*, to ask about a national story that appears on *Reforma's* homepage or to communicate an error that they have noticed on the webpage to the *Reforma* staff. The online news workgroup staffers are in constant communication with each other across the various platforms. These forms of communication are considered recognized methods for interaction among the online news workgroup, thereby creating a specific culture in the newsroom. In some cases, these forms of communication, such as instant messenger, are unique to the online news workgroup and not used or used infrequently among the print news staff.

These platforms are used to interact and to share in the decision-making process for news content posted to the site. This contributes to the collectivistic culture in the

newsroom in that the communication vehicles are used among a wider group for a greater good. This also contributes to the ways in which high-context communication (See Table 2.2) is used in the newsroom in that the specific language and terminology is embedded with several meanings such as “*cheque* (check the story please),” and “*cabeza* (top area of the page).” These forms of high-context communication only are understood by the online news workgroup and also instill a sense of urgency and of responsibility that others on the newspaper staff may not quite understand or appreciate.

Second, another demonstration of the culture in the online newsroom can be connected to the how the online news workgroup staffers refer to themselves as “I” or “We”. As mentioned in the second chapter, this form of identification can be attributed to an individualistic or a collectivistic culture (See Table 2.1). At *The Chicago Tribune*, this form of “I” was observed more frequently during both informal and formal communication.

Table 4.1 : “We” and “I” statements made in *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom

Stated in communication	<b>Interview Transcripts (11 records)</b>	<b>Instant Messenger Records (22 records)</b>	<b>Internal Memos (14 records)</b>
“We”	478 references	158 references	118 references made
“I”	644 references	356 references	81 references made

As shown in Table 4.1, in an analysis of interview transcripts (11 records), the “I” form was more commonly found in 644 references. The instant messenger messages (22 records) showed a higher amount of the “I” form being used with 356 references made among the online newsroom staff. Lastly, the internal memos sent every couple of weeks

(14 records) from management showed a different tally of the form of “We” more frequently used with 118 references made.

In the examples above, the interview transcripts and instant messenger records show the “I” form being used more than “We” form. With the exception of the internal memos from management in which “We” was more common, this may be accounted for by the assumption that management wants to communicate a group or united culture in the message.

The appearance and frequency of “I” occurred most commonly among the online staff of *The Chicago Tribune*. This form of communication and repetitive action of using this statement demonstrates one characteristic of the individualistic culture that Hofstede (1980) defined in his work of what identifiable differences between a collectivistic and an individualistic culture.

At *El Norte*, the usage of the term “We” versus I” appeared more readily in daily interactions among the online news workgroup members, contributing to the characteristic of a more collectivistic culture in the newsroom. As shown in Table 4.2, in an analysis of interview transcripts and email messages (13 records), the frequency of the following statements was tallied. The references to “*nosotros*” (15) and “*nuestra*” (6), translated “we”, were some of the most frequent terms made in communication. This shows how much the staff members see themselves as a group rather than individuals in the newsroom.

Table 4.2 “We” and “I” statements made in the *El Norte* online newsroom

Stated in communication	<b>Interview Transcripts, Internal Documentation (13 records)</b>
<b>“Nosotros”</b>	15 references
<b>“Nuestra”</b>	6 references
<b>“somos”</b>	5 references
<b>“Estamos”</b>	7 references
<b>“Estuvimos”</b>	1 reference
<b>“Estoy”</b>	2 references
<b>“Yo”</b>	36 references

However, it is useful to remember that the invocation of “We” may be more intentional in these records since some were interviews; when answering the question, the interviewee may have identified themselves as part of the *El Norte* group versus identifying themselves individually. The interview transcripts also may be more likely to support the form of “I” (Yo) (36 references) being used because the interviews were one-on-one and the interviewee was asked questions about his or her perspectives and his or her role in the online newsroom. This can lead to the assumption that the form of “I” (Yo) is more likely to be used in these instances.

Overall, the usage of “We” is a part of *El Norte* newsroom culture, in which members acknowledge their role for the overall greater good than that of themselves. Aside from these documents, in daily observations, the use of “we” was very common with the online news workgroup. They would use “we” when referring to work they needed to complete, information they needed to receive for a story, or when they needed to make a decision for a specific story. There were very few instances where the

researcher observed the online staff stating “I” in their interactions with each other. In many ways, this online news workgroup of *El Norte* has created this culture that supports the characteristics of a collectivistic culture by using “we” versus “I” in the news production process. This form of communication on a frequent basis demonstrates one characteristic of the collectivistic culture that Hofstede (1980) defined in his study of differences between a collectivistic and an individualistic culture.

Another factor that can contribute to relating the culture of the online news workgroup is in the way in which members identify themselves. Again, as mentioned in the second chapter, this form of identity can contribute to whether a culture is collectivistic or individualistic (See Table 2.1). This reflects in how they refer to themselves as a “group,” “team,” “folks” or some other plural reference. At *The Chicago Tribune*, the surprisingly found that the online news workgroup has a variety of ways in which they identify themselves versus simply having one form of identification. These multiple forms show that they do see themselves as part of a group, albeit indirectly. Table 4.3 details the results of the frequencies in which certain terms of group forms were found in communication among the online news workgroup.

Table 4.3 Forms of group statements made in *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom

Stated in communication	<b>Interview Transcripts (11 records)</b>	<b>Instant Messenger Records (22 records)</b>	<b>Internal Memos (14 records)</b>
<b>“Group”</b>	26 references	2 references	8 references
<b>“Team”</b>	2 references	11 references	6 references
<b>“CND”</b>	1 reference	14 references	20 references
<b>“Crew”</b>	1 reference	2 references	12 references
<b>“Ct.com”</b>	11 references	12 references	16 references
<b>“Folks”</b>	17 references	7 references	3 references
<b>“You”</b>	693 references	173 references	72 references

As shown in Table 4.3, in an analysis of interview transcripts (11 records), the most frequent terms stated were “you,” “group,” “ct.com,” and “folks.” In an analysis of instant messenger records (22 records), the most frequent terms being stated were “you,” “CND,” and “ct.com.” In an analysis of internal memos to staff sent by management on a monthly basis (14 records), the frequency of the following statements were “you,” “CND,” and “ct.com.” (Note: CND is abbreviated for continuous news desk group)

As the example demonstrates above, the online news workgroup staffers of *The Chicago Tribune* do identify themselves as part of a group within a larger media institution. This is apparent in the usage of the words of “team,” “crew,” “folks,” and specific names like “ct.com” that all incorporate characteristics of a group. This helps to reflect the characteristics of a collectivistic culture that Hofstede (1980) has defined.

At *El Norte*, the online newsgroup members identified themselves in a variety of terms but more often than not recognized themselves as a unit and as a group, not as individuals. As shown in Table 4.4, in an analysis of interview transcripts and email

messages (13 records), the frequency of the following statements was tallied. As shown in Table 4.4, one of the most often cited references was “elnorte.com” showing the reference to the online news workgroup among the staff.

Table 4.4 Forms of group statements made in *El Norte* online newsroom

Stated in communication	<b>Interview Transcripts, Internal Documentation (13 records)</b>
<b>“grupo” *</b> <b>*tied to Grupo Reforma</b>	3 references
<b>“equipo”</b>	4 references
<b>“elnorte.com”</b>	8 references
<b>“somos”</b>	5 references

As the example above demonstrates, the online news workgroup members of *El Norte* identify themselves as part of a group within a larger media institution. This is apparent in the usage of the words of group (*grupo*), team (*equipo*) and specific names like elnorte.com, which all incorporate characteristics of a group. This helps to reflect the characteristics of a collectivistic culture that Hofstede (1980) has defined.

The form of interactions among the online news workgroups presents the next factor that explains the form of culture in the online newsroom for both cases. At *The Chicago Tribune*, the online news workgroup works in a formal and a professional culture geared toward a shared notion of time that creates an environment that is fast-paced and efficient. As a result of this culture, *The Chicago Tribune* workgroup reflects characteristics of a culture with the short and straightforward interactions intrinsically required of the work produced on a minute-by-minute basis.

The following excerpt details the form of short and straightforward communication that occurs daily in the online newsroom. This stems from a developing story of a major storm that tore through the metropolitan area of the city one afternoon. In this excerpt, two editors, two producers and a copyeditor are communicating updates and changes to the story of the developing storm. Without much detail, the online news workgroup is able to tell each other what they are doing and what they need in a very straightforward and direct manner such as phrases of "I'll add new flood photos to the flood gallery," "is updated with a bunch of new grafs at top," or "i fixed." This is one example of many the researcher observed that embodied very direct interaction that represents a form of low-context communication, as discussed in the table of attributes in the second chapter (See Table 2.2). There is not much background information required to understand what is being communicated and what actions are being required.

EditorB (4:04:33 PM): I'm generating a new photogallery just for the storm.  
chi-070823storm-photogallery. I'll add new flood photos to the flood gallery  
EditorA (4:04:53 PM): chi-web\_rainy-weatheraug24 is updated with a bunch of  
new grafs at top. CopyeditorA, please backread. Thanks.  
EditorA (4:06:29 PM): i'm updating again shortly. No one go into  
chi-web\_rainy-weatheraug24 without telling me first, please.  
ProducerA (4:08:59 PM): storm forum slug is ready: chi-070823stormforum-storylink  
EditorA (4:09:49 PM): chi-web\_rainy-weatheraug24 is updated.  
EditorB (4:09:50 PM): chi-070822localflood-photogallery has been updated.  
Awaiting storm photos for storm gallery  
CopyeditorA (4:09:56 PM): got it  
\*\*\*\*  
ProducerB (4:11:18 PM): Typo in chi-web\_rainy-weatheraug24. "lims" sted "limbs"  
EditorA (4:11:43 PM): i fixed.

\*Instant messenger names changed to protect identity of the individuals in this study

\*\*\*\*other conversations among online newsroom staff have been omitted for focus on the specific excerpt only.

This example above demonstrates one of many instances observed in the newsroom in which *The Chicago Tribune* online news workgroup uses a low-context communication that is acknowledged and understood by the group members. Hall identifies a high-context communication culture “most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message” whereas low-context communication is “the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code” (Hall, 1976, p.79). Thus, the use of “I’m updating”, “is updated”, and “fixed” all show the short number of words and phrases used that keeps work flow going without much meaning involved in the interaction, it is more explicit versus implicit as mentioned in the table of attributes in Table 2.2 in the second chapter. This form of interaction facilitates the efficiency of daily website production as well as the collaborative processes that staff members undergo hour by hour. The form of communication *The Chicago Tribune* online news workgroup used is housed within a culture that has more individualistic characteristics as mentioned earlier, but there are remnants of a collectivistic culture that effectively support the collaborative news production process.

At *El Norte*, a common observation of this newsroom is the frequency of extensive conversations among the online news workgroup members regarding content and its method of presentation on the site. This contributes to the form of interaction, considered excessive talk that falls under the notion of collectivistic culture. During my daily observations, the online news workgroup members would spend time explaining specific stories and how they would communicate them on the site before posting. Instead of rushing to post the headline, brief and story, the staff members would discuss the best

wording or content thus illustrating one way that excessive talk in the newsroom contributes to collectivistic culture.

Another part of the collectivistic culture is the form of interaction embedded with meaning, showing high-context communication. The following small excerpt details how the high-context communication culture is observed in the online newsroom, via an email that consisted of the online sports editor of content's budget for the for assembling an interactive section about a special soccer game with the local soccer team, called the "Clásico (Classic)." The illustrations (Illustration 4.2 through 4.4) that appear after the email excerpt are the finished examples of what was discussed in the email excerpt budget.

BUDGET:  
CABEZA:  
CLÁSICA PASIÓN

FOTOS INTRO:  
N3211374 (Afición Tigres) y N3211379 (Afición Rayados)

TEXTO INTRO:  
Tigres y Rayados disputan el Clásico Regio 85.  
Aficionados felinos y rayados saben que el duelo de este sábado es una nueva oportunidad de sacar el pecho y ver por encima del hombro al deportivamente odiado rival, o en caso contrario, de vivir entre las sombras los días venideros.  
Se parte de esta nueva edición del duelo fraternal y participa enviado tus fotos demostrando tu pasión, un audio sobre un chiste del equipo rival y revive algunos Clásicos pasados en una videogalería.

En fotogalería  
Mádanos tu foto donde manifiestes el cariño por tu club.  
Envíala al siguiente correo electrónico: [tufoto@elnorte.com](mailto:tufoto@elnorte.com)  
<<mailto:tufoto@elnorte.com>>

En audio  
Demuestra tu habilidad contando un chiste del equipo rival.

Deja tu mensaje de máximo un minuto de duración en el siguiente número telefónico:  
8150-8770.

En video

Repasa algunos Clásicos que han dejado huella y son recordados a través del tiempo.

FOTOGALERÍA:

VER FOTOS

Pasión por el Clásico (Foto para ilustrar el llamado: N3210314)

<[http://www.elnorte.com/galeria\\_de\\_fotos/40/078381/](http://www.elnorte.com/galeria_de_fotos/40/078381/)>

COLECCIÓN DE AUDIO:

ESCUCHAR AUDIOS

Chistes sobre el rival (Foto para ilustrar el llamado: N3210329)

<[http://www.elnorte.com/galeria\\_de\\_audios/15/029897/](http://www.elnorte.com/galeria_de_audios/15/029897/)>/

(Pendiente a dónde se va a marcar o qué grabación se va a escuchar)

COLECCIÓN DE VIDEO:

VER VIDEOS

Videogalería de Clásicos pasados

(Pendiente por enviar Isaías)

---

[English Translation Follows]

BUDGET

Top Part

Classic Passion

Photo Introduction:

N3211374 (Tigres Team) and N3211379 (Rayados Team)

Introduction Text:

Tigres and Rayados dispute the Regional Classic 85

Fans know that the game this Saturday is a new opportunity to take over a rival, or if not, to live in the shadows of loss in the days ahead. Be a part of this game and participate by sending your photos showing your passion for the team, share a joke via audio about the rival, and relive some past Classic moments in the videogallery.

In photogallery

Send us your photo that shows your passion for your team.

Send it to the following email address: [tufoto@elnorte.com](mailto:tufoto@elnorte.com)

<<mailto:tufoto@elnorte.com>>

**In audio**

Demonstrate your ability to tell a joke of the rival team.

Leave your message of no more than a minute in duration at the following telephone number: 8150-8770.

**In video**

Relive Class moments that have left their mark and are remembered through time.

**Photogallery:**

See photos

Passion for the Classic (Photo to illustrate the name: N3210314)

<[http://www.elnorte.com/galeria\\_de\\_fotos/40/078381/](http://www.elnorte.com/galeria_de_fotos/40/078381/)>

**Audio Collection:**

Listen to audio

Jokes about the rival (Photo to illustrate the call: N3210329)

<[http://www.elnorte.com/galeria\\_de\\_audios/15/029897/](http://www.elnorte.com/galeria_de_audios/15/029897/)>/

(Pending where it will be saved and downloaded for listening)

**Video Collection:**

See videos

Videogallery of past Classic games

(Pending on what is sent)

---



Illustration 4.2: Example of the audio jokes sent in by readers.



Illustration 4.3: Example of photogallery of fans photos' demonstrating their passion for their favorite team.



Illustration 4.4: Example of the section that appeared on the site about the Classic game that combined the elements mentioned in the budget excerpt above.

The above examples qualifies the contribution of high-context communication culture to the news production process and how the *El Norte* online news workgroup members interact on a daily basis, especially the online editors and print editors of the sports section. The email excerpt offers specific information on what each section should entail as part of this special sport event, such as the information that should go in the audio collection as reflected in Illustration 4.2 and the information that should go in the photogallery as reflected in Illustration 4.3. The excerpt provides specific terminology and language - without any explanation as to what the online editor should do to prepare the special soccer section. The order itself of how information is given by categories (without an explanation of where and how it should be laid out) is a form of high-context communication (embedded with meaning) for the online sports editor to know exactly

where the content should go. It shows how much this form of interaction influences content and how it arrives on the website. This excerpt shows only a portion of a larger, extremely detailed email document, which therefore shows how much the use of excessive talk actually exists in this newsroom's written communication. This form of interaction, embedded with meaning and with little explanation, helps with the efficiency of daily production of the website and the collaborative processes undergone hourly. Once again, this example demonstrates the daily utilization of high context communication in the newsroom.

The last section answered the fourth question of this dissertation and described how journalists work together in the two newsrooms and the form of communication they use, whether implicitly or explicitly to complete the news work. The results showed that *The Chicago Tribune* online news workgroup demonstrated more characteristics of the low-context and individualistic culture whereas *El Norte* online news workgroup demonstrated more characteristics of the high-context and collectivistic culture. The next section will describe how the online news workgroup members collaborate together with the news content they post on the website.

#### **4.7 THE CONTENT IN THE NEWSROOM: PRINCIPLES SUPPORTED, THE PRINCIPLES IGNORED.**

The final question of this study is connected to all the previous questions of how the news routines of the online news workgroups support or interfere with the journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness? *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* online newsrooms demonstrate through the collaborative news production process how

they support the principles of verification and comprehensiveness. As described earlier, verification is defined as a way “to prove to be true by demonstration, evidence, etc., confirm” (Webster’s New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2002, p.704). In this investigation, verification is clarifying and confirming the information the journalists received before posting it to the website. Comprehensiveness is defined as “wide in scope; inclusive” (Webster’s New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2002, p.126). In this study, comprehensiveness is compiling more information in an effort to provide this information to the news citizen. This means that the online journalists might have included (with a single story) the possibility of additional stories, multimedia, hyperlinks or the use of posting comments, forum discussions, voting polls, or other methods to garner audience participation.

#### **4.7.1 Major Findings: *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte***

The news routines of the online news workgroups of *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* support the journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness through two observations. First, these principles were directly observed in the ways in which the news artifacts were considered developing items by the staff. As a result, this created an environment that allowed for the rewriting and for the verification process in the newsroom to be constantly in the review process as well. Second, this environment supported the principle of comprehensiveness, which was considered part of the news routine, to add context to stories by giving more details, by providing additional

resources, or by seeking additional voices to inform the news citizen accordingly. These two observations will be discussed next.

At *The Chicago Tribune*, the online staff spends a sufficient amount of time receiving news from the newspaper or the wires that it posts to the site. Staff members will not change the news story content, but will rewrite headlines and briefs that appear on the website page. The continuously rotating news desk staff will rewrite or will create new stories for breaking local news stories. The researcher noticed that the rewrite editors caught errors in a story and consulted the stylebook to confirm or to the editor to clarify or verify a quote before posting it to the website. The majority of the staff will participate in the activity of rewriting. As part of this rewriting, the roles of verification and clarification are observed more clearly. The following interview excerpt provides information on the importance of the innovation editor's recent decision to include the copy desk into the online news production process.

So, when I wanted the Copy Desk to be part of the web operation, right, I saw it as -- ... I mean, most of the stories that needed copy editing because they were new and because they were somewhat dangerous were out of Metro. And so, that's why I went to Metro saying, "Can you move your folks up during the day and be a part of it?"....

I didn't know where it would go, but all I knew was that mostly the stories from Metro needed copy editing and needed sort of some -- more of them than any, they need more sort of attention. And so, when Metro and the Continuous News Desk merged, I really felt like Metro ought to take things from--from beginning to end, and they haven't done it quite yet. But they should really operate under the idea that they would write the story, edit it, post it, with the headline, and send the web staff a link or, a slug for the link to decide whether to put it on the home page or not, and that these guys here would do the local page, like they do the Metro sections. Right? They decide the news judgment on those Metro section fronts, and they would do it on the web.

As the interview excerpt demonstrates, the innovation editor's resolution to include this department into the news production process helped show the importance of and the support of the principle of verification as the online news workgroup would post stories to the website in this newsroom. Prior to this, the online operation certainly ensured stories on the site held accurate information, but the editor's decision helped to make the process of making stories accurate a collaborative process between the print and online operations. The news artifacts with which the online news workgroup works on a daily basis are shared among online staff members because when the story comes from the wires, the continuous news desk staff or the print operation and the online staff members will change or will update the story as it develops, depending on who holds the responsibility for the story at that given moment. As a result, this sharing of the news artifacts often are rewritten as well as verified amongst the group. The activity of the group using instant messenger to check and verify pieces of information before they post provides ample opportunity for this observation. The instant messenger tool allows the staff to verify and to correct their information for the site. They are able to edit grammar and punctuation corrections that would not be as easily done via verbal interaction. Some examples of how the verification principle was supported in this newsroom are given below. The first example is an excerpt from instant messenger of a breaking news story about a storm that came into the city. There was an error found in the story with the word "limbs." This is an interaction in instant messenger between a producer and editor about the typo. In less than a minute, the typo was fixed.

Producer (4:11:18 PM): Typo in chi-web\_rainy-weatheraug24."lims" sted "limbs"  
Editor (4:11:43 PM): i fixed.

The next example is from an instant messenger excerpt about a story that was posted to the site by a producer, who promptly identifies a problem with the story's wording and informs the copyeditor accordingly. The copyeditor notices the problem and corrects it in less than minute.

Producer (2:31:57 PM): exposure story is posted... tho head needs to fixed at story level i beleive

Producer (2:32:04 PM): officials to official....

\*\*\*\*

Copyeditor (2:36:34 PM): thanks for the typo on official

Producer (2:36:40 PM): no problemo...

Copyeditor (2:36:42 PM): typo fix that is

The next example, also from instant messenger, demonstrates how the online news workgroup of two editors, a rewrite editor, and a copyeditor work together to confirm a detail for a story about a potential robbery that occurred at a travel agency in the city. After the information was confirmed, they updated the story; one member in the group posted first on the local page before its placement on the homepage by the editor.

Rewrite editor (12:46:22 PM): TRAVEL AGENCY is in Source for 2 reads

copyeditor (12:46:31 PM): got it.

\*\*\*\*

Rewrite editor (12:47:08 PM): do TRAVEL fast please

copyeditor (12:47:32 PM): i spoke too soon. i'll do the second edit.

editorB (12:47:39 PM): ok i'll take it first

Rewrite editor (12:48:24 PM): editorB, please add: Police got call at 12:07 p.m.

Employee of travel agency confirmed by phone that robbery occurred.

editorB (12:48:40 PM): k

editorB (12:50:27 PM): copyeditor, that's ready for a second

editorB (12:50:28 PM): in CopyEditor

copyeditor (12:50:32 PM): got it

\*\*\*\*

copyeditor (12:53:57 PM): TRAVEL ready in slot

editorB (12:54:05 PM): I'll produce

\*\*\*\*

editorB (12:55:11 PM): chi-070613travel-agencyjun13 is ready to post

editorB (12:55:14 PM): that's breaking

editorB (12:55:24 PM): 2 men in disguises rob travel agency

editorB (12:55:28 PM): i'll put on local

editorA (12:57:57 PM): Travel agency robbery posted on front

\*Instant messenger names changed to protect identity of the individuals in this study  
\*\*\*\*other conversations among online newsroom staff have been omitted for focus on the specific excerpt only.

As the examples above demonstrate, the process of confirming, rewriting and correcting are a part of the minute-by-minute tasks of *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom staff. In particular, these forms of verification and rewriting require the online news workgroup to be in constant contact, rendering the instant messenger tool a necessary one for the staff. The sharing of verifying and of rewriting content amongst the online news workgroup is at the heart of collaboration in the newsroom. The focus in this newsroom is on getting the story right, regardless of the number of individuals involved. This becomes more apparent in breaking news situations, based on the researcher's observations. When the online news workgroup of *The Chicago Tribune* shares the responsibility of the verification process, the likelihood of collaboration becomes more apparent and in some cases, contributes to making the story more accurate than if only one journalist participated in the process.

At *El Norte*, the staff shares and verifies the news artifacts before they appear on the site. This form of being accurate was observed several times both in the newsroom and in how much the entire staff places a large value on this principle. With the use of the

content management system, the staff effectively works together on a single story or a headline or a brief to ensure its accuracy. The diversity and input, not just from one editor but from several at the same time, contributes to the accuracy of the content.

The following excerpt details how one story was checked and was verified by multiple members of the *El Norte* online news workgroup before it was posted. One morning in September, two men were killed at a gas station in the city. The online news workgroup members post the story as they receive information from the agency. Later that afternoon, the editor of the local section of the newspaper confirmed to the online editor of the homepage the murdered men were federal officials. The online editor received this information, revised the story on the homepage, and checked with the online director before publishing it. Within minutes, the story was reposted to the website and another online editor sent a SMS alert to subscribers of the story's recent developments. This example demonstrates how the online news workgroup of *El Norte* moves quickly to post developing information for an evolving story - but yet is careful to post only truly verified information.

Another example: On another day of observation, the online editor found a typo in a story from a sister publication online, *Reforma*. The typo involved a year, stating 2006 when it should have been 2013. The online editor quickly corrected the version on *El Norte*'s site and promptly informed the staff at *Reforma*.

Another example involved a designer who works on the animated infographics for the website his corrections discovered errors to the flash projects. The designer was notified by the online news workgroup of the homepage section of an error in the use of

an accent symbol. They used the symbol in a word appearing in a posted flash package that regarded how to drive and to know the signs of the road. The package had the wording of “*sabes manejar*” (knowing how to drive) with *sabes* having an accent. However, the word “*sabes*” (do you know) does not have an accent. He went into the original file, made the change, uploaded the flash project to the server, and notified the online news workgroup accordingly.

One evening, the online editor assigned to the homepage arrived for her shift and within a few minutes, noticed a module missing from the homepage. Another online editor went in to fix it and uploaded the module to the website. The online editor didn’t realize it was gone until the editor told him.

These examples show how much importance verification and accuracy hold to the *El Norte* online news workgroup whether in text stories, flash projects or standard items on the homepage. They also reflect how much the collaborative news production process contributes to this focus. No individual is responsible for making changes or for correcting information because the *El Norte* online staff shares the responsibility among each other and will make the changes accordingly.

The next principle that supported in both newsrooms was the comprehensiveness they considered for the news stories they posted to the website. At *The Chicago Tribune*, the staff adds assets and resources to the stories during a day of news production. This process is a shared responsibility by the online newsroom staff and the members of the online news workgroup contribute pieces to a developing story in many forms throughout the day.

During one day of observation, a major storm descended upon the metropolitan area and left significant damage in its wake. The storm lasted for several hours. During the ensuing storm, the researcher observed how fervently the online staff members sought to provide any and all available information on the website for the reader. These pieces of information included the development of an online interactive map for readers to contribute information of storm damaged locations. The staff also provided adding a list of resources for readers to call for utility issues stemming from the storms. Information about expressway and street closures was provided. As the day progressed, users had the ability to submit comments and photos about their storm experiences to the site.

While the story developed, the online staff members of *The Chicago Tribune* worked together as a collective, across sections and areas, to provide information on the site as efficiently as possible. For example, the producer asked the editor about posting an advisory on the site for the imminent inclement and dangerous weather and as a service to their readers, they did. As the weather began to move in that afternoon, the producer updated the homepage with a story, while another producer drafted an email advisory for the readers and the continuous news desk wrote updates to the overall storm story when the suburbs became the first hit major target of the storms.

The staff monitored the weather so the wording on the site could be exact (i.e. from a storm warning to a storm watch). The producer and a rewrite editor investigated it and changed it accordingly. A breaking news announcement then was posted. The producer who put together the weather advisory email sent it to the readers and then made a brief report for a partner radio station on the latest storm developments and sent the audio file to them. That afternoon, at the Page One meeting of the print staff, the

editors discussed the stories of the day but the developing storm usurped most of the discussion. In the middle of the meeting, the storm forged its way into the metropolitan area and as we looked out the windows of the newsroom, we realized the magnitude of the approaching storm. The sky surrendered to ominous dark as the rain and wind gusts pounded against the windows. Over the loud speaker, an announcement requested that the staff move away from the windows and stay tuned for evacuation procedures if necessary.

While the storm developed, the producer and the editor constantly updated the homepage and other staff members posted a request for readers to send in their comments and their photos about the storm. The photographers deployed several hours earlier to capture shots of the weather sent in some photos and one producer began to upload them to a gallery, while another producer added assets like hyperlinks and related stories to the main story itself. The producers discussed the possibility of having a forum to discuss the storm's damage and one producer began to work on setting up an area for comments (See Illustration 4.5) from readers. As the storm wreaked havoc within the city and its suburbs, the editor asked a designer to make an online interactive map where readers could submit addresses of locations with reported storm damage.

Share your storm stories

How has today's severe weather affected you or your neighborhood? Please include your location.

Send us your weather photos [here](#).

Someone called me and said they heard that a tornado touched down on Irving Park near Sheridan Road. Can anyone confirm?

Submitted by David

5:10 PM CDT, Aug 23, 2007

Some electrical lines and many trees down, including one blocking access to our neighborhood. Think I saw and heard lightning take down two trees a block away. Occurred between 3 and 4 in Arlington Heights.

Submitted by Mark

5:06 PM CDT, Aug 23, 2007

Wrigleyville Southport area is a disaster. Trees, big ones all over streets blocking traffic. next door and our building is a huge tree crashed in. this is on Greenview

Submitted by jane

5:04 PM CDT, Aug 23, 2007

Working in Des Plaines-We have been told by co-workers that Dempster West, Prarie, and River Road are impassable in places in due to down trees.

Submitted by Robin

Illustration 4.5: Excerpt of the comments area that was posted in the late afternoon on the site for users to give reports on storm damage in the areas where they live.

As work continued, they added a photo gallery and another producer put together transportation links to inform the commuters of any obstacles for their evening pilgrimage home. Weather links and video from the partner television station were hyperlinked to the main story and on the homepage. Within a two-hour timeframe, several assets were added to the main story from several producers of the online staff (see Illustration 4.6). What began in the morning as a two-person piece by the 5 p.m. hour had 13 contributors

**Update 4:36 p.m.:** A flock of funnel clouds, high winds and torrential rains blitz the Chicago area, uprooting trees, snarling traffic and soaking pedestrians. *(Tribune photo)*

- [Photos](#)
- **Commuter updates:** [Metra](#) | [CTA](#) | [Expressways](#) | [Flight tracker](#)
- [Tell us if you've been hit](#) | [Send in your storm photos](#)

**Update 4:57 p.m.:** A flock of funnel clouds, high winds and torrential rains blitz the Chicago area, uprooting trees, snarling traffic and soaking pedestrians. *(Tribune photo)*

- [Photos](#) | [Video](#)
- [Weather-related delays on the CTA](#)
- **Commuter updates:** [Metra](#) | [CTA](#) | [Expressways](#) | [Flight tracker](#)
- [Tell us if you've been hit](#) | [Send in your storm photos](#)
- [Tom Skilling's 7-day forecast](#)
- [Updated radar image](#)

Illustration 4.6: Excerpt of what appeared on the site after the storm had come into the city. In this particular in between a 20-minute timeframe, several new assets were added to the story that included video and weather-related information.

As demonstrated in the above example, the online news workgroup of *The Chicago Tribune* performed multiple tasks to disseminate as much information as possible on the site to provide the reader with the most comprehensive view of the storm situation. The online news workgroup shared the responsibility of adding assets and resources to the story throughout the day and communicated in-person and through instant messenger when these items would be posted into the story. This combination of contributions from the members of *The Chicago Tribune* online news workgroup allowed the story to expand as news developed.

Aside from breaking news events, the online news workgroup will post multiple resources any given story on the website. As mentioned earlier, the use of the asset list on a daily basis is a common practice among the online news workgroup; they will add video, audio, maps or user-generated content resources to a variety of stories ranging from sports to features. In this excerpt below, the asset list has three categories of stories that have additional pieces added to them.

For the Batman/Blowup category, a video (chi-070830batman-wn) and photogallery will be added to the story. In honor of the Batman movie being filmed in Chicago at that time, the photogallery and video show a building being blown up in the city. Another category includes Katrina Anniversary that will include a video (chi-katrinaanniversaryvideo-wn) with the story that is a look at the anniversary of the Katrina Hurricane that hit New Orleans in 2006. Also, more timely stories have assets such as Pontiac guns, Metra murder suicide, and Teachers deal mentioned in the excerpt below that will include videos on the website. In some cases, the online news workgroup will

feature a video in lieu of a text story, depending on the subject matter and on the viable resources to cover it.

-----Original Message-----

**From:** \*\*\*\*

**Sent:** Wednesday, August 29, 2007 4:31 PM

**To:** \*\*\*\*

**Subject:** Asset Inventory -- For Thursday Morning

\*\*\*

Batman/Blowup  
chi-070830batman-wn  
Photogallery slug TK

Mummy  
chi-070829mummy-photogallery

Katrina Anniversary  
chi-katrinaanniversaryvideo-wn (must be first item)  
chi-katrinavideo-html  
/katrinavideo

Pontiac guns  
chi-pontiacvideo-wn (bucket with multiple clips)

Metra murder suicide  
chi-070829metradeath-wn

Teachers deal  
chi-070829cpsdeal-wn

\*\*\*\* names omitted

\*\*\* information deleted from excerpt not applicable to excerpt

In another example, the assets can multiply, depending on how much information can be gathered and assembled for the story. The following excerpt of another asset list shows how a hard news story (bank rob) as well as a soft news story (fashion) have assets

added to them as well by the online news workgroup that help to make each of these stories be more comprehensive for the reader.

-----Original Message-----

**From:** \*\*\*\*

**Sent:** Thursday, August 30, 2007 7:23 PM

**To:** \*\*\*\*

**Subject:** Asset inventory for 8/30

## **ASSETS**

\*\*\*

### **BANKROB**

chi-070830bankchopper-wn -- Main category player, needs to be first asset in order to work

chi-070830hostage2-wn (chi-070830hostage2-html)

chi-070830hostage-photogallery

chi-070830hostage2-wn

**\*\*We have a Rogers Park Bank category in WN. Put all video in it, and it will automaticall appear on the story level\*\***

**FASHION IN CHICAGO** (attached to story we had up Thurs. am)

chi-070830fashion-photogallery

\*\*\*\* names omitted

\*\*\* information deleted from excerpt not applicable to excerpt

This example shows how a hard news story (bankrob) about a bank robbery and hostage situation in the city had multiple videos and a photogallery added to its text. On the softer side, a story (fashion in Chicago) that appeared earlier in the day also had a photogallery added to it. These asset lists are given to the whole online news workgroup and they will work accordingly on adding the assets needed for each story. As mentioned earlier, the online news workgroup will share this responsibility among each other and they will automatically incorporate these assets into their daily practices in the

newsroom. They would not think twice about adding additional information or resources to a story to enhance the experience for their readers. The online news workgroup members will add context when appropriate to each story they work with for the website.

These examples demonstrate how much the collaborative news production process supports the principle of comprehensiveness. Through the collective effort of the producers, editors and reporters of the online news workgroup, they will contribute their ideas and suggestions to each other of how to give additional context to a story whether it's a related story, photo slideshow, additional hyperlinks or an interactive map. Multiple online news workgroup members will go in and add these resources throughout the day to the story. The online news workgroup works together in coming up with ideas and suggestions on what to add to a story that can help the make the story comprehensive for the reader.

At *El Norte*, the online news workgroup has the opportunity to add context to the stories via the use of additional resources. This practice - keeping the story accurate as well as comprehensive - is supported, based on observations made. The following excerpt details how one story had multiple resources added by multiple members of the online news workgroup before it was posted.

Early one September morning, two men were killed at a city gas station. The online news workgroup members posted the story as they received information from the agency. Two online editors quickly received the information and updated the site and sent an SMS to subscribers. Later in the day, the online editors added relevant stories and a photo gallery. By the end of the day, one local editor received more developments and

confirmed for them that the two men killed were federal officials. The online editor revised the story and headline accordingly.

Aside from breaking news events, the online news workgroup will post multiple resources to the website. This is common practice. For instance, on the website, video stories may range from a hold-up in a store to a body being picked up on the street to a murder in front of a school. Included in this same area of the website, an animated infographic will show the number of murders in Mexico in the different states and how they increased over time. The content that the online editors will upload to the website includes the breaking news events as well as the contextual information (such as animated infographics) to provide additional information to the readers. Adding resources to stories often occurs, as is adding resources to the overall section itself.

Another example includes the coverage of a major 90 day cultural event in the city of Monterrey (starting in September and ending in December) called the Forum. During the time of observation, the newsroom staffers worked hard to provide on the website a variety of resources for the event, adding comprehensiveness to the overall story. The evening before the festivities began, the researcher observed an online news workgroup of three web designers creating resources for the website. The researcher observed all three simultaneously accessing design artifacts and helping each other with each artifact. The researcher observed one designer working on a sidebar banner that would list special features of the forum on the homepage throughout the 90 days (See Illustration 4.7). Another designer worked on a flash infographic of the history of the local Foundry, a place where metal is cast (See Illustration 4.8). Another designer worked on a flash infographic –showing the places to see as part of the Forum’s attractions - that

would include a video and 360-degree view of the place (See Illustration 4.9). Each resource appeared on the homepage and the special section of the Forum (See Illustration 4.10) on the site. In this example, the online staff of *El Norte* provided several additional resources to offer context about the Forum, either through history via a timeline or through visuals such as videos or photos about the event. In all these cases, the online news workgroup of designers and the editors provided the comprehensiveness of the event to help the reader understand the Forum.



Illustration 4.7: Forum banner (left) developed for the website the night before (September 19) by one of the designers.



Illustration 4.8: Flash infographic that was developed by one of the web designers the night before (September 19) of the history of the Foundry in the city that is now a museum and park and part of the Forum’s festivities.



Illustration 4.9: Flash infographic that was developed by one of the web designers the night before (September 19) of the spaces and places of the Forum with 360-degree views and videos.



Illustration 4.10: Special section dedicated to the three months' of Forum activities in the city of Monterrey.

These examples show how comprehensiveness was supported in the *El Norte* online newsroom and how the collaborative news production process contributes. Editors receive the basic information of a news story but will add enhanced context through the appropriate collected content that relates to the story such as video, photo galleries, or animated infographics.

#### 4.8 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

There is a distinct culture and communication in both newsrooms. *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* online newsrooms each have online news workgroups but the group is not clearly identified when one walks in the newsroom. It entails analysis of the level of collaboration between the producers and the news production process. The online news workgroup proved to be a flexible and an invisible entity in *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte*. At *The Chicago Tribune*, there were six variations of the online news

workgroup observed and nine variations of the online news workgroup observed at *El Norte*.

Also, the connection between the online news workgroup and the news production process details the kind of collaboration in this newsroom. This connection is facilitated by a shared responsibility among the online news workgroup with a shared set of constantly developing news artifacts. This supports the previously mentioned statement of an organizational structure that is more collaborative because of the shared power and participative decision-making that occurs among the organization's members (Kraus, 1984, pp.20-21).

*The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom has a culture collectivistic and individualistic although the researcher discerned more individualistic characteristics. The communication culture in *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom reflects a combination of high-and low- context communication, but more low-context communication characteristics were observed. The culture of the online newsroom and the level of collaboration among the online news workgroup demonstrated support for the principles of verification and comprehensiveness when producing content for the website. Based on observations in varying newsroom dynamics, these principles were supported more in breaking news situations in comparison to common daily news events.

The *El Norte* online newsroom has a culture both collectivistic and individualistic, although more collectivistic characteristics were observed. The communication culture in *El Norte* online newsroom reflects a combination of high-and low-context communication, although more high-context communication characteristics were

observed. The culture of the online newsroom and the level of collaboration among the online news workgroup demonstrated how verification and comprehensiveness were supported when producing content for the website.

One can conclude that this online newsroom illustrates how collaborative online news production occurs and the ways in which it can be identified. There is no one form or correct way of collaboration, as it occurs across various levels. The extent of this newsroom's collaboration is facilitated by its culture and to its prevalent form of communication. These findings detail how *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* staff works with the news content it produces daily and they describe a different process from that of previous literature that has identified news production as linear, hierarchical and assembly-line like. This case describes newswork that is flexible and diverse, with collective actions at the group level by the online staff that makes the production connected and/or supportive of a collaborative form of communicating and of working. It shows how structured journalistic principles (verification and comprehensiveness) can be supported in an unstructured, informal and flexible way.

## **Chapter 5: Comparative Results: *El Norte* and *The Chicago Tribune***

This study sought to document two online news production systems and to determine whether the collaborative group work observed there supports or interferes with the principles of verification and comprehensiveness in these newsrooms. They serve as case studies showing how these online newsrooms and these journalists may reflect innovative practices that contribute to the social transformation of journalism itself. This chapter will detail the patterns of similarity and of difference in the two newsrooms by their collectivistic/individualistic culture and by high-and low-context communication characteristics.

Comparative analysis of media systems in different countries can provide new ways of thinking and of understanding of phenomena. Comparative analysis also can show how communication across space and time in different geographic locations can be identified on a macro level:

Comparative inquiry cosmopolitanizes, opening our eyes to communication patterns and problems unnoticeable in our own spatial and temporal milieux....only comparative research can overcome space- and time-bound limitations on the generalizability of our theories, assumptions, and propositions.... Only comparative analysis can explore and reveal the consequences of differences in how communication is organized at a macrosocietal level (Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992, pp.3-4).

Comparative research expands existing notions of observed patterns and allows us to apply our research questions and our hypotheses in other cultures to test their validity and reliability. In some cases it breaks existing notions or helps attain clarity in the formation of ideas toward knowledge in that area.

When doing comparative research, a researcher must tread cautiously because of the cultural, political, economic, historical and social milieu embedded in each country. Providing context and an understanding of each country and its indigenous culture is necessary, because it places the findings within their appropriate time, space and place.

Comparative research in journalism scholarship has been rare. Of the conducted studies, many were limited by geography (i.e. Europe and the United States) and methodologies (i.e. surveys and questionnaires). Most of these studies looked at what represents the journalistic profession in a particular country and/or region and its implications on the news produced.

Some of the most well known comparative studies in journalism are surveys of the journalism profession. For decades, scholars have adopted the survey methodology used by Johnstone (1976) and Weaver and Wilhoit (1986; 1991; 1996; 2007) and replicated the survey in other countries for comparison. Others have completed studies about foreign correspondents in a variety of countries (Lambert 1956; Suh 1972; Mowlana 1975; Ghorpade 1984; Nair 1991; Wilnat & Weaver, 2003). A few scholars to date have achieved surveying journalists around the globe – one has accomplished this research in 21 countries (Weaver, 1998; 2005) and another group of scholars achieved this research with journalism students in 22 countries (Splichal & Sparks, 1994).

As for comparative research of online journalists specifically, there have been few studies in this area, mainly confined to the United States and/or European countries (Deuze 2002; Deuze, Neuberger & Paulussen, 2004; Deuze & Paulussen, 2002; Kopper, Kolthoff & Czepel, 2000; Quandt, Altmeyden, Hanitzsch & Loeffelholz, 2002). Few

scholars have analyzed the online journalistic culture and communication cross-nationally between the United States and Mexico as this study does.

The next section provides details regarding the United States and Mexican media systems before addressing the study's comparative findings. The following section will detail each country's media system and how they practice journalism.

### **5.1 MEDIA SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES: HOW JOURNALISM IS PRACTICED**

When we consider the U.S. media system, the journalism practiced within this system is based on a free and democratic western model. That model supports and encourages the press to publish freely, to inform citizens of the community accordingly, and to serve as a watchdog of the government on behalf of the citizens of the country.

The U.S. media system is protected and guided by the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution. The amendment states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances" ("A Century of Lawmaking," n.d.).

Journalists follow this amendment and also are guided by their own set of ethical rules and guidelines for their profession. These include the 1922 American Society of News Editor's "Canons of Journalism," later renamed "Statement of Principles" in 1975 that provide ethical and professional performance guidelines. The principles include

responsibility (i.e. serving the public by informing them with information to make informed judgments for their daily lives), freedom of the press (i.e. prevent and protect from any public or private assault on the press), independence (i.e. avoid conflict of interest and do not compromise their integrity), truth and accuracy (i.e. news is accurate and free of bias and all sides presented fairly), impartiality (i.e. identification and clear delineation of opinion and fact in news stories), and fair play (i.e. respect rights of the people in the news and follow standards of decency and be accountable to the public) (ASNE, 2006). According to the organization, “These principles are intended to preserve, protect and strengthen the bond of trust and respect between American journalists and the American people, a bond that is essential to sustain the grant of freedom entrusted to both by the nation's founders” (ASNE, 2006).

Other guidelines include the 1997 “Statement of Shared Purpose” by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Committee for Concerned Journalists which identified nine principles for journalists and news citizens in the United States to follow in their daily lives. These nine principles include journalism’s first obligation is to the truth; its first loyalty is to citizens; its essence is a discipline of verification; its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover; it must serve as an independent monitor of power; it must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise; it must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant; it must keep the news comprehensive and proportional; and its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2001, pp.12-13). The nine

principles later were published in a book by Kovach and Rosentiel (2001) called, “The Elements of Journalism” (“Principles of Journalism,” 2006).

In addition, other media institutions like the Poynter Institute and individual news organizations, including *The Chicago Tribune*, provide their own set of ethical guidelines that they want their journalists to follow. In combination, these guidelines and principles help to create the ways journalism is practiced in the United States.

The journalistic model practiced by most U.S. news organizations is based on an objective and non-partisan form of reporting the news. In many U.S. newsrooms, writing style guides are mandatory; for example, using the Associated Press style guide in addition to a style guidebook written by the particular news organization. These style guides tell journalists how to write and how to report the news. These stylebooks and the ethical guidelines mentioned earlier help to contribute to how methodology in U.S. journalism.

According to Freedom House, an organization that surveys the freedom of the press globally, the United States is a free country when it comes to the press. “Press freedom enjoys a strong foundation of legal protection in the federal Constitution, in state and federal laws, and in court decisions. The Supreme Court has repeatedly issued decisions that take an expansive view of freedom of expression and of the press. In particular, court decisions have given broad protection to the press from libel or defamation suits that involve commentary on public figures” (Freedom House, 2006).

Despite these press freedoms, the U.S. media system has not been without error or without problems. In recent years, journalists have come under scrutiny for not releasing

sources' identities and information as part of "national security" concerns and in certain situations have faced jail time as a result; others have tried to no avail to obtain access and to report on the doings at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo (Guantanamo is a United States naval base that has, in recent years, detained individuals there that are allegedly a national security threat to the country. In recent years, reports have circulated that the base is holding these individuals without much evidence of the threat they pose and that the individuals are not being treated humanely while being detained there); and others have refused to give up their sources or documentation for criminal investigations and the journalists subsequently then were placed under further scrutiny for their work (Reporters without Borders, n.d.; Freedom House, 2006). In addition, journalists face corporate and self-censorship issues within their own news organizations.

## **5.2 MEDIA SYSTEM IN MEXICO: HOW JOURNALISM IS PRACTICED**

The media system in Mexico is a system in transition. Mexican journalists have been under an authoritarian regime and limited democracy in the past century. As a result, this has impacted the media system and the way in which the journalists work (Wilke in Weaver, 1998, p.436). However, authoritarian rule in the country has changed to a democratic administration in recent years.

According to Freedom House, Mexico is "partly free" as of 2006 with 54 cases of violence against the media filed (Freedom House, 2006). According to the international non-profit organization Reporters without Borders, in their 2007 report of the state of the media that included Mexico, economic development and democracy does not ensure a

safe haven for journalists. In fact, they stated nine journalists were killed and three were missing (Reporters without Borders, 2007). Corruption and self-censorship still are apparent in the media system, but not as much as in previous years.

For years, Mexican journalists have faced challenges to report and to cover the news of their cities, states, and country because of the limitations by certain individuals and institutions of influence. Corruption was considered a common practice in many newsrooms because of several factors. In some cases journalists would receive *embutes* (weekly or monthly payments) or *chayotes* (occasional gifts) when covering a public official or politician (Alves, 2005, p. 182). This level of corruption placed many journalists at risk not only for their profession but also for their lives if they did not follow or did not accept corruptive practices; some journalists who fought against these practices have been kidnapped or have been murdered as a result of their reporting activities.

In recent decades, new leadership in the Mexican government, particular individuals in the journalism profession, and the owners of media companies are contributing to a transformed media system similar to the model of journalism practiced in the United States. Some of the leaders - including Alejandro Junco de la Vega's family and their transformation of the *El Norte* newspaper and its journalistic model now being followed within their own organization (*El Norte*, *Mural*, *Palabra* and *Reforma*) and by competitors (*El Universal* among others).

Lawson, a Mexico scholar, has determined that Mexico has undergone a "media opening of the fourth estate," credited to changes within the country versus influences on

the outside, “In the broadest sense, journalistic norms developed in reaction to the failings and vices of traditional Mexican journalism. Exposure to foreign models of reporting and to the example set by pioneering independent journalists highlighted those vices and failings.... By the mid-1990s, Mexican journalists had radically different views of their role in society and their relationship to the regime” (Lawson, 2002, p. 179). Lawson also mentions the Tlateloclo massacre of 1968, the bankruptcy of 1982, the economic crisis in the 1980s, the Mexico City earthquake in 1985, the presidential elections in 1988, the Salinas reforms from 1990-92, and the events of 1994 as also contributing.

Hughes, another scholar on Mexico, states that in addition to democratization and to the free market, the Mexican media evolved to a civic journalism model because of individual journalists and because of media institutions change for the better:

Mexican journalism until the 1980s was what sociologists would call an overdetermined institution. Incentives, values, and assumptions all acted as the glue holding together regularized patterns of journalistic thought and action that endured across decades and a field of similarly behaving news organizations....I argue that journalistic change is a process that develops through exchange between four domains of institutional action: the environment, the organizational field, the newsroom as an organization, and the social psychological world of the individual journalist (Hughes, 2006, pp.16-17).

Alejandro Junco de la Vega, who instituted a different economic model for his journalists and an ethical standard to beat corruptive practices at his newspaper, personifies this form of individual journalists representing a change. “He also succeeded in transforming the small newspaper into a sort of pioneer of the modernization process that the media are now undergoing in Mexico. The company created the tradition of

paying journalists much higher salaries than the ones paid by other newspapers, and prohibited them from receiving embutes or chayotes” (Alves, 2005, p.183).

Waisbord (2000) has found that the Mexican media system changed to a more watchdog role as the result of the journalists losing their timidity to investigate the government and to show its true colors, a process several other countries in Latin America were undergoing at the same time as well “Press denunciations were surfacing almost everywhere in the region. Dailies such as *Siglo 21* in Guatemala, *La Prensa* in Panama, *ABC Color* in Paraguay, and *Reforma* and *El Norte* and the newsweekly *Proceso* in Mexico, to name a few, also featured “investigative reports.” Even in countries such as Mexico and Paraguay where the timidity of the press, its tendency to cozy up to state powers, and its disinterest in monitoring power abuses were legendary, new winds seemed to be blowing (ABC Color, 1997; Orme, 1996)” (Waisbord, 2000, p. xx).

Part of this watchdog and investigative role also may receive support from the creation of FOIA-like law that passed in Mexico in 2002, allowing journalists unprecedented access to government documents (Alves, 2005, p.185). As these scholars mention above, the media system in Mexico was and still is undergoing major changes as it forms its own journalistic model.

Unlike the United States, the Mexican media system does not have an established set of ethical guidelines for its journalists to follow. Each news organization determines its own rules of conduct and professionalism. For the *El Norte* organization, during my newsroom observations, I observed that each journalist in the organization did have a

guidebook on their desk (from the owner, Alejandro Junco de la Vega) that gave guidelines on conduct both in and outside the newsroom as well as guidelines on writing style that included spelling and grammar tips. Some of the rules included, but were not limited to, the requirement of professional attire while working either in the newsroom or out in the field, the refusal of gifts or bribes from anyone, and the respect and responsibility they carry by representing the *El Norte* news organization when interacting with the public.

A specific list or set of principles that all Mexican journalists follow remains to be developed on a national scale. Currently, few non-profit organizations are proponents for journalistic standards in the country, but the most prominent since 2003 is CEPET (Center for Journalism and Public Ethics). Its mission is, “to promote an independent, investigative and public interest journalism to contribute to a more informed society (CEPET, n.d).” It holds workshops and seminars, and conducts research and investigations of the press in Mexico.

In summary, scholars such as Lawson (2002), Hughes (2006), Waisbord (2000), and Alves (2005) have stated that the Mexican media have transformed into a watchdog, civic model as well as adversarial role for the community that reflects a different form of journalism than what was practiced under an authoritarian regime. Several wonder what the final form of journalism will be in this country.

### 5.3 THE COMPARATIVE FINDINGS.

The previous section gave information on the comparative research done in journalism and provided information on the United States and Mexican media system. This next section will describe how the two newsrooms were both similar and yet different in their newsroom practices as it relates to the research questions investigated in this study.

Overall, *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* online newsrooms reflect a collaborative news production process. They also demonstrate how dependent the work is on the online news workgroup rather than on the individual journalist. Lastly, the two newsrooms demonstrate how this collaborative process contributes to the ways in which verification and comprehensiveness are supported versus being interference in the stories being posted to the website.

But *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* online newsrooms reflect varying degrees of collectivistic and individualistic culture as well as high-and low-context communication. This is not surprising considering the cultural milieu of each country and its media systems. I will now discuss the similarities between the two online newsrooms.

### 5.3.1 The Culture in the Newsroom: dependency on the group

In this study, both newsrooms showed how much the online news production process depended on a group rather than the individual. As part of this group effort, it was possible to identify levels of collaboration between the group members in each newsroom. This study does not argue that collaboration may not have existed in these newsrooms or other news organizations until this research, but it seeks to identify where and how the collaboration occurs. Collaboration always may have existed and those of us in academia may not have been able to identify it in previous scholarship.

Table 5.1: Online news workgroup findings in two newsrooms: *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte*

<b>Online news workgroup trait</b>	<b><i>The Chicago Tribune</i></b>	<b><i>El Norte</i></b>
Physical location of group work	X	X
Time of daily group meetings	X	X
Form of communication used in group work	X	X
Online or virtual location and access of where group work is saved/worked on	X	X
Time in which news production occurs	X	X

The online news workgroup in each newsroom was explained by the same characteristics, including the physical location of the group work, the time of daily meetings among staff, the form of communication used by the group, the online or virtual location of where news work was completed, and the time in which news production occurred (see Table 5.1). These findings show how both newsrooms have online news workgroups with these same general characteristics. In both newsrooms, the researcher identified several variations of online news workgroups consisting of three or more people (6 in *The Chicago Tribune* and 9 in *El Norte*). These online news workgroups held similar traits in regards to how they form as groups, when they work, where they work, and how they work in producing content for their appropriate website.

Table 5.2: Collaborative news production process findings in two newsrooms: *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte*

<b>Collaborative news production traits</b>	<b><i>The Chicago Tribune</i></b>	<b><i>El Norte</i></b>
Use of shared artifacts	X	X
Shared responsibilities	X	X
Shared understanding of what is a news event for the site	X	X
Online or virtual location and access where group work is done	X	X
Form of communication used	X	X
News artifacts are recognized as developing items that are shared	X	X

Also, the collaborative news production process was identified by the same characteristics in each newsroom that included the use of shared artifacts in the newsroom, shared responsibilities for the site by the staff, shared understanding of what constitutes a news event, the online or virtual location and access of where work is completed, the forms of communication used by the group, and how the news artifacts were treated as developing items by the staff (see Table 5.2). These findings show that the two newsrooms have a common set of characteristics to demonstrate the news production process for the news website. Through the online news workgroup’s shared responsibilities, their use of news artifacts, the way they communicate, and how they work with continually developing content, they collaborate minute by minute to post news to the website.

Table 5.3: Journalistic principles supported in the collaborative news production process in two newsrooms: *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte*

<b>Journalistic principles supported</b>	<b><i>The Chicago Tribune</i></b>	<b><i>El Norte</i></b>
<b>Verification</b> News artifacts are developing items; rewriting and verification were a constant activity	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Comprehensiveness</b> News routine to add context to stories through the use of giving more information; providing additional resources; seeking additional voices to help the news citizen be informed.	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

### **5.3.2 The Content in the Newsroom: principles supported**

In this study, both newsrooms showed how much the collaborative online news production process supported journalistic principles because of how they posted content to their websites. One of the principles included verification and how the information provided to the online news workgroup was checked and reviewed before posting it to the website (See Table 5.3). This information was considered developing, so the online news workgroup never actually finished with a story that went on the website (See Table 5.3). In many instances, multiple members within the online news workgroup at both newsrooms confirmed information with each other before it was posted.

Another principle included comprehensiveness and how the information given to the online news workgroup could be supplemented (See Table 5.3). The online news workgroup at both newsrooms took a story that developed throughout the day and added resources and perspectives to the story like additional stories or commentary, photogalleries, videos, or maps to it throughout the day to demonstrate this principle.

The process of confirming, correcting and rewriting were a part of the minute-by-minute tasks of the online newsroom staff at *The Chicago Tribune*. In particular, these forms of verification and of rewriting required the online news workgroup to be in constant contact with each other via instant messenger. This collaborative tool was an integral part of the process.

In the *El Norte* newsroom staff members utilized an instant messenger tool to communicate as well, but they also used the content management system when verifying information before posting it to the website. With the use of the content management system and having the information open and available, in tandem, on multiple computers to multiple members of the online news workgroup, the staff was able to work together on a single story, headline, or brief to ensure its' accuracy.

In both newsrooms, the diversity and the contributions for making a story accurate did not come from one editor but from several at the same time, contributing to a different form and different level of accuracy than if only one individual journalist was involved. The sharing of verifying and of rewriting content by the online news workgroup was at the heart of collaboration in both newsrooms. The focus in these newsrooms was about getting the story right, no matter how many individuals were involved.

Comprehensiveness also was supported in these two newsrooms. The news artifacts in *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom can be considered pieces of a larger puzzle in that it required many additional pieces to render it a complete picture. This was observed in how the staff added assets and resources (such as photogalleries, videos, and user-generated submitted content for example) to the stories during a day of news production. This process was a shared responsibility by the online newsroom staff that contributed pieces in many forms to a developing story throughout the day. In the *El Norte* newsroom, the news artifacts with which the online news workgroup worked also developed throughout the day. The online news workgroup had the opportunity to add

context to the stories throughout the day via the use of additional resources like photogalleries, videos and additional stories. The practice of keeping the story accurate - as well as comprehensive - was supported in both newsrooms.

### 5.3.3 The Culture and Communication in the Newsroom: Hofstede and Hall Applied

*The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* online newsrooms reflect varying degrees of collectivistic and individualistic culture as well as high-and low-context communication. In observing the cultural variability of these two online newsrooms, they demonstrate how the culture and the communication contribute to the online news production process and how the online news workgroup works in this environment on a daily basis.

Table 5.4: Collectivistic/individualistic culture and high/low context communication characteristics in two newsrooms: *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte*

<b>Online newsroom culture and communication traits</b>	<b><i>The Chicago Tribune</i> online newsroom communication and culture</b>	<b><i>El Norte</i> online newsroom communication and culture</b>
Individualistic culture	X	
Collectivistic culture		X
Low-context communication	X	
High-context communication		X

*The Chicago Tribune* newsroom demonstrated more individualistic characteristics and low-context communication (See Table 5.4). This was identified by the characteristics of the communication form utilized by the online news workgroup in their

daily activities, the amount of statements that they used in reference to “I” versus “We”, how the group identified itself, and the forms of interaction that occurred in the newsroom.

Table 5.5 High-and low-context attributes\*

<b>High-context attributes</b>	<b>Low-context attributes</b>
Preprogrammed information that is in the receiver and setting	Most of the information must be transmitted in the message to make up for what is missing
Economical, fast, efficient and satisfying, indirect	Highly-focused, slow, compartmentalized, direct
Restricted codes (words and sentences are collapsed and/or shortened)	Elaborated codes (words and sentences are extensive)
No need for detailed background information	Need for detailed background information
Easy flow of information – focus on the stored rather than transmitted information	Not an easy flow of information – focus on the transmitted rather than stored information
Fast messages include headlines, television, cartoons	Slow messages include books, poetry, print

\*Note: Compilation of attributes collected from (Hall, 1976, pp.74-101; Hall & Hall, 1987, pp.3-35)

During observations of the newsroom, the online news workgroup members communicate in short statements of one- to four-word phrases (i.e. “i’m in the gallery;” “what’s the slug;” “no objection”) to each other via instant messenger. This method allowed them to make tasks flow efficiently and without confusion during the news production process. The online news workgroup members were able to clarify

information and to provide details to the whole group regarding where the story was in the updating process without requiring much background information. Furthermore, during newsroom observations, the Chicago staff would use the terms of “I’m updating”, “is updated”, and “fixed”, all showing the short number of words and phrases used that keep work flow going without much meaning involved in the interaction. It’s a form of communication that is more explicit versus implicit. This form of straightforward and explicit communication represents characteristics of low-context communication (Hall, 1976) as shown in Table 5.5 of the high-and low-context attributes.

In addition, the culture reflected an individualistic culture, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, in an analysis of interview transcripts (11 records), the “I” form was more commonly found in 644 references. The instant messenger messages (22 records) showed a higher amount of the “I” form being used with 356 references made among the online newsroom staff. Lastly, the internal memos from management sent every couple of weeks (14 records) showed a different tally of the form of “We” more frequently used with 118 references made. In the examples above, the interview transcripts and instant messenger records show the “I” form being used more than “We” form. This reflects more characteristics of an individualistic culture (Hofstede, 1980). Also, the online news workgroup members identify themselves as part of a group within a larger media institution, a sentiment reflected in the usage of the words of “team,” “crew,” “folks” and specific names like “ct.com” that all incorporate characteristics of a group. This helps to reveal the characteristics of a collectivistic culture within the individualistic culture (Triandis, 1995).

On the contrary, in the *El Norte* newsroom, they demonstrated more collectivistic characteristics and high-context communication. This was identified by the characteristics of the form of communication used by the online news workgroup in their daily activities, the amount of statements used in reference to “I” or “We,” how the group members identified themselves, and the forms of interaction in the newsroom.

The use of in-person communication and instant messenger were the most common in this newsroom. The whole group - and not the individual members - would make decisions throughout the day. They also used a specific language and terminology embedded with several meanings such as “*cheque* (check the story please),” and “*cabeza* (top area of the page)” that supports a high-context form of communication (Hall, 1976). The language and terminology they used was unique to the online staff and the researcher rarely observed the same terminology spoken by the print news staff. The print news staff did not interact and communicate with the same terminology and language; one reason may be that these terms are specific to the online medium because of the natural characteristics of the Web. For instance, the online staff must check the site often and update it throughout the day, thus making the use of “check your story please” applicable. Another example can include the use of saying the “top area of the page” is in reference to the presentation and the packaging of the news on the computer screen via the top portion of the webpage. This term is not applicable to the print newspaper, which is typically referred to as “above the fold,” a term which references the way in which the print product is held and packaged. These two examples show how the vernacular of the online staff is specific to their work and is a form of implicit information requiring an understanding of the technology. As a result, the terminology and language is embedded

with meaning that only the online news workgroup and staff would understand. This form of communication that is based on elaborated codes and assumes a background in the terminology, contributes to attributes of high-context communication as shown in Table 5.5.

Also the culture reflected a more collectivistic culture, in an analysis of interview transcripts and email messages (13 records), the frequency of the following statements was tallied. The references to “*nosotros*” (15) and “*nuestra*” (6), which means “we”, were some of the most frequent terms made in communication. Also, the online news workgroup members identified themselves in a variety of terms but recognized themselves as a unit as a group and not as individuals. An analysis of interview transcripts and email messages (13 records) led to a tally of the frequency of the following statements. One of the most common references used was “elnorte.com” as their website. Other common references included team (*equipo*) and group (*grupo*). These examples show the degree to which the staff members see themselves as a group rather than individuals, a characteristic of collectivistic culture (Hofstede, 1980).

In combination, these findings demonstrate the prominence of collectivistic culture and high-context communication characteristics in the *El Norte* newsroom, in contrast to the low-context and individualistic culture characteristics found in *The Chicago Tribune* newsroom.

#### **5.4 ADDITIONAL FINDINGS**

There were other discoveries found in both newsrooms worth mentioning. The additional findings included the importance of competition and of the audience.

As for competition, the *El Norte* online newsroom staff considered the local and regional newspapers and the television stations as competition for their news. In many instances, I observed the online news workgroup of the homepage viewing competitor newspaper websites (located in Monterrey and other cities in Mexico) several times a day as well as watching local, national or international television news programs such as CNN Español to see how their journalists were covering news. This activity forced the staff stay on top of the flow of news and to plan accordingly. For *The Chicago Tribune*, the online newsroom staff considered the local newspapers, the radio and the television news programs as their competition as well as national news sites. Several times I observed the online news workgroup of the homepage viewing competitor news websites, listening to local radio news programs, or watching a national news program like CNN to see how news was developing throughout the day. This activity also made the staff want to stay on top of news happening in the city and around the world as they went about their news production. Both online newsroom staffs told me in several interviews that they felt superior to their competition because of their stature and their reputation in their respective cities. However, they also understand that they do exist in a competitive market because audiences are not limited in their use, their access and their preference to one medium but are dedicated to multiple media.

Another aspect these two newsrooms shared was the importance placed on the audience. In the *El Norte* newsroom, the online staff would look at modules on the website that showed the most e-mailed, most viewed, or most searched areas to see how stories and news were performing on the site throughout the day. In the *El Norte* newsroom, the online news workgroup did not have access to the traffic software or

reports; only the upper management had access to this information. The online news workgroup still remained connected to its audience by looking at these modules to see how certain stories were performing. In *The Chicago Tribune* newsroom, the online news workgroup had access to the traffic software and reports. The researcher observed several instances of the online news workgroup checking site traffic constantly to see which headlines and photos were being clicked on most. Also, on a frequent basis, the online news workgroup members received emails from the online editor about daily and weekly traffic performance to keep them informed of the site's overall performance. In both newsrooms, albeit the ways in which the online staff knew how the audience reacted to content on the site was different, staff members had a common goal to know what their audience was seeing and reading.

These additional findings show how the news competition and the audience themselves contribute to the collaborative news production process. The news competition contributes to the collaborative news production process because it forces the online staff into a group routine. The routine of constantly looking at the competition to see how it covers an issue or event and as a collective, one or many of them may identify a story or an angle that another on the staff might not have identified. This information then is communicated within the group and they will plan accordingly. Thus, this routine of checking the competition becomes part of the collaborative news production process.

The importance of the audience for the two newsrooms also contributes to the collaborative news production process because it also forces the online staff into a group routine. The routine of looking at when and how often the readers view content on the

site throughout the day makes the staff cognizant of their performance in informing the news citizen. As a group, the online staff is aware of each other's site updates by watching how the news audience reacts to what they post. For example, this routine allows the staff to inform each other when a headline or brief may be unclear for the reader (because the site modules or traffic reports show the lack of clicks or pageviews for the story) and they will come together to change it. The greater purpose among the group then becomes getting the information, making it clear and accurate for the news citizen. Thus the collaborative news production process makes the online news workgroup work toward the purpose of serving the public.

## **5.5 CONCLUSIONS**

In summary, these two newsrooms show - despite their different media systems and cultures - they share a common online news production process that is collaborative and relies on the online news workgroup rather than the individual journalist. The two newsrooms support a collaborative news production process because of the culture and communication characteristics embedded in each online newsroom.

Despite each newsroom possessing a different prominence of high-and low-context communication and collectivistic and individualistic culture characteristics, both newsrooms remained supportive of a collaborative news production process. As mentioned earlier, a workplace culture not only will reflect one culture over the other, but also may possess more prominent characteristics of one culture over the other (Triandis, 1995). We can conclude these two newsrooms show different levels of collaboration –

this is facilitated by how much the cultures and communication overlap with each other, allowing for one to dominate as shown in Figure 5.1.

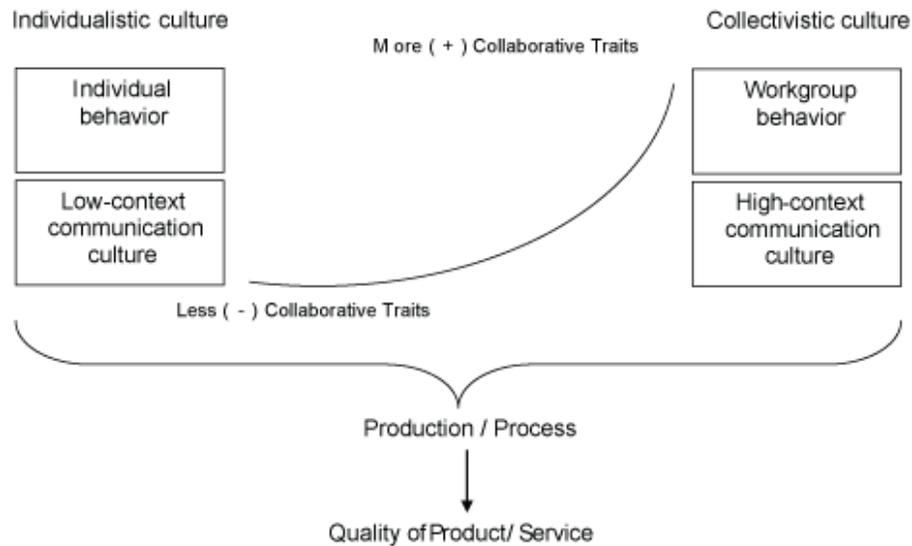


Figure 5.1: Model B: Organizational Culture Defined by Facilitation of Collaboration

As Model B shows in more general terms, the organizational culture (individualistic and/or collectivistic) and the form of communication (low-context and/or high-context) used in the organization help to facilitate collaborative traits as part of the news production process that effect the outcome, in this case, the news content posted on the Website. The collaborative traits follow a curve as shown in Model B that show how more likely or less (+ or -) they are facilitated by a specific culture and communication form.

In this case, we can identify that the *El Norte* online news workgroup facilitates more collaboration, based on the collectivistic culture and high-context communication characteristics observed. On the other hand, *The Chicago Tribune* online news workgroup has less collaborative traits based on the individualistic culture and low-context communication characteristics observed. This does not mean that collaboration does not exist at *The Chicago Tribune*, it does. Rather its collaborative traits are not as clearly recognizable; perhaps because the existing culture is embedded with values, beliefs and assumptions contradictory to a collaborative form of working, making it difficult to recognize that another form of culture can be transforming in this newsroom but the collaboration is trying to happen. This finding may have implications of the national cultures of each newsroom that are overriding the influence of the professional culture in both newsrooms.

In summary, collaboration can be better facilitated by a high-context communication and collectivistic culture as identified in the online newsroom at *El Norte*.

## Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

“If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants.”

--Issac Newton

When thinking of collaboration, the above quote from Issac Newton may help to contextualize the meaning of this term. Collaboration apparently can only occur when group members, the environment, the culture and the communication support each other to allow completion of a task or an activity.

This chapter will provide a summary of the findings of the two cases observed, how these findings can be explained from a larger journalism perspective, and the implications of the findings for the journalism profession and academy. First, the summary of the findings will be provided.

### 6.1 MAJOR FINDINGS

In this dissertation, the researcher conducted a cross-national comparative ethnography of two newsrooms (*The Chicago Tribune* in Chicago, Illinois and *El Norte* in Monterrey, Mexico) to document how online journalism is evolving. The researcher wanted to discern if differences existed in how a collaborative news production system functions and how well these systems support certain journalistic principles.

This is illustrated more generally in Model A (see Figure 6.1) that showed how an organizational culture (individualistic and/or collectivistic) with a specific form of communication in the organization (low-context and/or high-context) and work behavior (individual or workgroup) impacts how work is produced and the quality of its outcome (product and/or service). Therefore, the production of work is affected by what form of collaboration is employed and nurtured within the organizational culture.

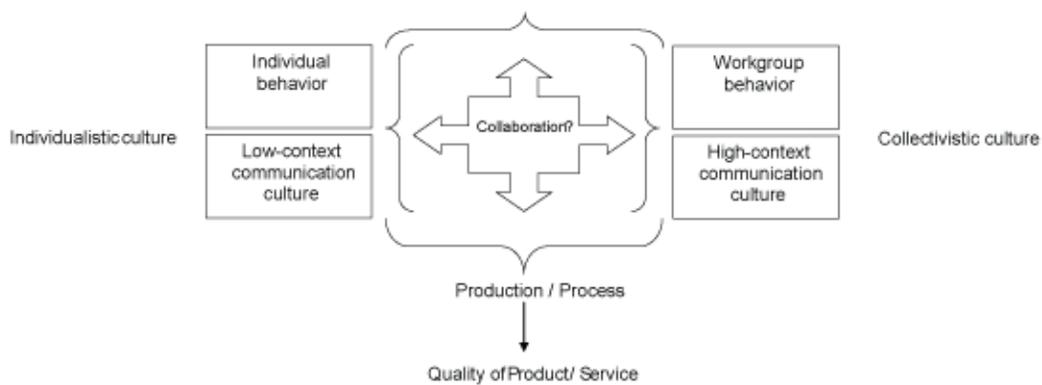


Figure 6.1: Model A: Organizational Culture Defined

In this study, the researcher conducted formal and informal interviews with the staff, in addition to being a participant-observer. The researcher also collected several forms of documentation that contributed to the findings in this study. The major research questions examined included: 1) What are the characteristics of an online news workgroup in the online newsroom? 2) What form of collaboration is employed in the online newsroom? 3) What are the collaborative traits of the online news production process? 4) To what degree is the online newsroom a collectivistic or individualistic culture? A low-or high-context communication culture? All of these questions above tie

into one overall research question: 5) Do the news routines of the online news workgroups support or interfere with the journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness? The specific answers to each of these research questions are discussed next.

Specifically, this study found that for the first research question that the online news workgroups in *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* can be described by the following characteristics: (1) the physical location of the group work in news production, (2) the time of the daily group meetings among the staff, (3) the form of communication used in the group work, (4) the virtual or online location and access of where the group work was saved and worked on, and (5) the time in which the news production occurred.

The second research question identified the form of collaboration employed in the online newsroom and this was illustrated by the kind of group work done in news production on an hourly and a daily basis in both online newsrooms. This is demonstrated through the use of 1) shared artifacts in the newsroom, 2) shared responsibilities, and 3) a shared understanding of what is considered a news event for posting on the site.

The collaborative traits of the online news production process were the third research question and this was answered in the study by the facilitation of several factors in the two newsrooms. They include 1) the virtual or online location and access of where group work is executed and then saved, 2) the form of communication used in the workgroup, and 3) the way in which news artifacts are treated as developing items. The combination of these three factors shows the flexibility among the workgroup members in their daily tasks, a shared venue for communication, and that news artifacts are not owned by one particular individual but shared among the group.

The fourth research question identified the culture in both online newsrooms. In the case of *The Chicago Tribune*, the online newsroom has individualistic and low-context communication characteristics whereas for *El Norte*, the online newsroom has collectivistic and high-context communication characteristics. These characteristics can be demonstrated through specific observations made at both newsrooms. These include 1) the form of communication used in the group, 2) the amount of statements that referenced “I” versus “we”, 3) the ways in which the group identified themselves as a group or other, and 4) the forms of interaction that occurred in the newsroom.

The final research question identified news routines of the online news workgroups of *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* do support the journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness through two observations. First, these principles were directly observed in the ways in which the news artifacts were considered developing items by the staff. As a result, this created an environment that allowed for the rewriting and for the verification process in the newsroom to be constantly in the review process as well. Second, this environment supported the principle of comprehensiveness, which was considered part of the news routine, to add context to stories by giving more details, by providing additional resources, or by seeking additional voices to inform the news citizen accordingly.

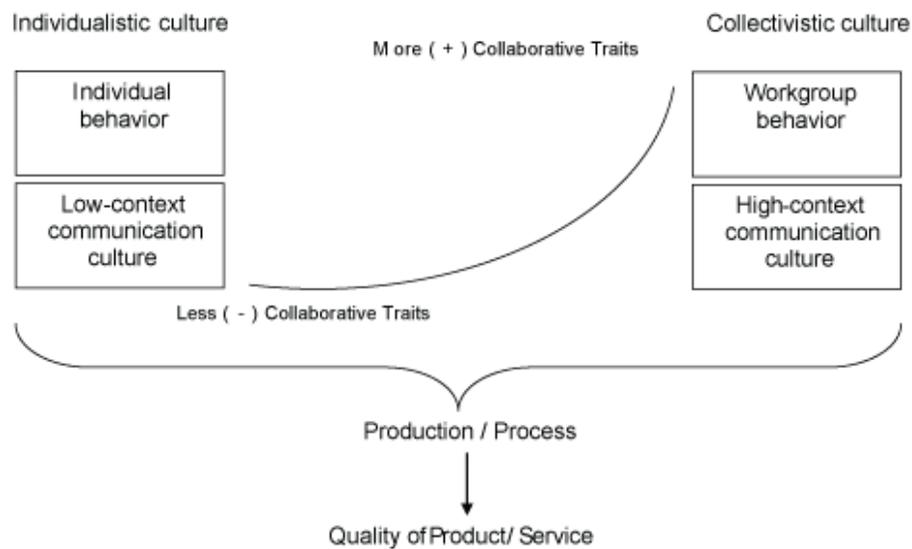


Figure 6.2: Model B: Organizational Culture Defined by Facilitation of Collaboration

Based on the answers to the above research questions, it can be illustrated that *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* do indeed have a collaborative news production process in the online newsroom. This collaborative news production process is shown through a group effort that allows for the journalistic principles of verification and comprehensiveness to be supported while posting content to the news website. As Model B shows in more general terms, the organizational culture (individualistic and/or collectivistic) and the form of communication (low-context and/or high-context) used in the organization help to facilitate collaborative traits as part of the news production process that affect the outcome, in this case, the news content posted on the Website. The collaborative traits follow a curve as shown in Model B that show how more likely or less (+ or -) they are facilitated by a specific culture and communication form. Therefore, the

collaborative news production process is facilitated more by a high-context communication and collectivistic culture in the news organization as identified at the online newsroom of *El Norte*.

The answers from the research questions in this study illustrate some theoretical and observational findings (as shown in Figure 6.3). Specifically, this study supports through observations, interviews and documentation that 1) an organizational culture is illustrated in the newsroom; (2) the theory of organizational culture concludes that teams and workgroups can exist in the newsroom; (3) collaboration in the newsroom is identifiable within the workgroup structure; (4) organization culture can be illustrated in part by the level of dependency (collectivism/individualism) members in the organization have on each other as well as the implicit and explicit (high/low-context) communication used by the members in the organization thus, the journalists in the online newsroom do reflect these forms of culture; (5) the newsroom culture does impact the collaborative work produced that supports levels of accuracy and context in the news posted to the website. These theoretical and observational findings are illustrated in the next section (as shown in Figure 6.3).

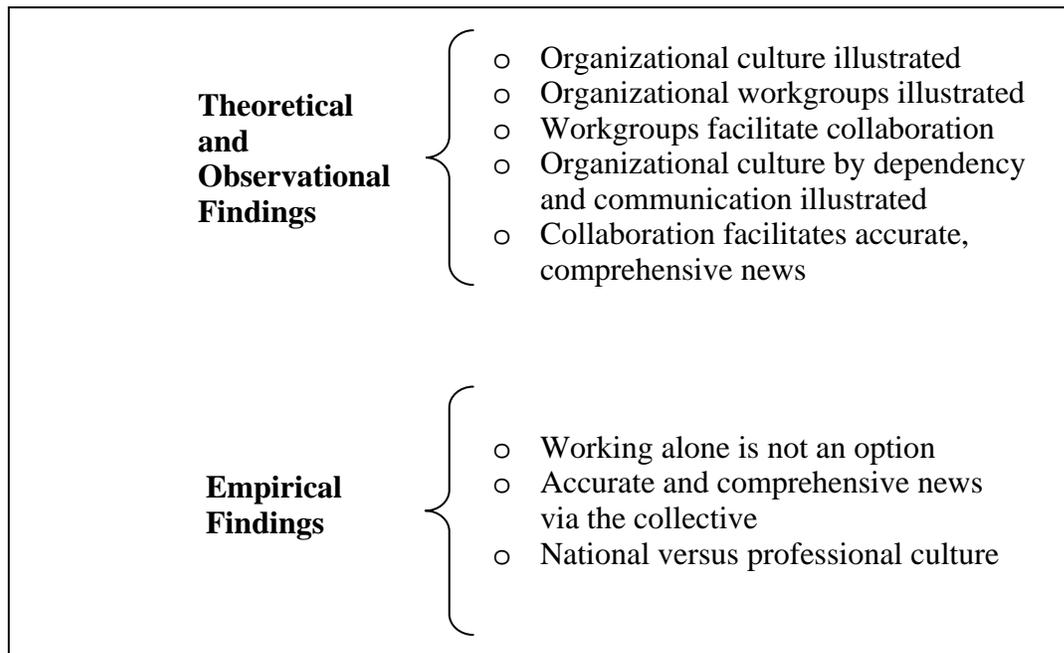


Figure 6.3: Major Findings of *The Chicago Tribune* and *El Norte* Online Newsrooms

## 6. 2 THEORETICAL AND OBSERVATIONAL FINDING 1: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ILLUSTRATED

First, an organizational culture does exist in the newsroom and this was illustrated in this study. Organizational culture is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 2004 p.17). The two newsrooms in this study demonstrated that they have a particular way in which the members of the organization think, act, and communicate. Organizational culture theory has garnered support for its theoretical significance through the work of those in business management, in anthropology and in

other fields (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Schein, 1985; Sathe, 1985; Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1984; Kilmann, Saxton, Serpa & Associates', 1985). This dissertation identified that the form of communication and language the online news workgroup members used, the physical and virtual spaces where they work, the ways they interacted with each other, and how they performed their daily activities identified forms of organizational culture unique to their news organization. In addition, their newsrooms were embedded in journalistic as well national cultures that influence the ways in which the members act, think, and communicate. Thus, the importance of understanding an organizational culture in these two cases illustrates that a newsroom does have a culture – but it is complicated and consists of several attributes explicit as well as implicit, embedded and on the surface of the environment, as well as within individuals and the group.

### **6.3 THEORETICAL AND OBSERVATIONAL FINDING 2: ORGANIZATIONAL WORKGROUPS ILLUSTRATED**

Second, organization cultural theory concludes that teams and workgroups do exist in the newsroom and this was illustrated by the observations made of the two newsrooms in this study. Original organizational theory posited that only individuals could perform work in the workplace. Another school of thought emphasized the behavior of individuals in the organization, or the “human relations” aspect. Not until the 1930s did the human relations aspect become a field of study and the organizational behavior of groups become recognized. Drucker (1959) and McGregor (1960) stated that the notion of organizations functioning by individual contributions was no longer

applicable and argued for considering an organization as a group of individuals because the work required in this post-industrial and complex world required multiple people and resources for the completion of tasks and services. This dissertation identified that the journalists in the online newsroom can be placed into a structure of a workgroup required to complete multiple tasks as part of the collaborative news production process. The two newsrooms demonstrated that workgroups of three or more individuals existed and that their structures and their shapes changed depending on the situation, such as six variations of the workgroup at *The Chicago Tribune* and nine variations of the workgroup at *El Norte*. These workgroups formed and united by common attributes that included the physical and the virtual location of their work, how they communicated with each other and the language they used to interact, and when they would work and meet. Thus, understanding the workgroup structure in the newsroom makes us aware in these two cases that they exist formally and informally, and are flexible yet consistent in structure and in performance.

#### **6.4 THEORETICAL AND OBSERVATIONAL FINDING 3: WORKGROUPS FACILITATE COLLABORATION**

Third, collaboration exists in the newsroom and can be facilitated when there is a workgroup structure. Scholars in organizational and business management literature identified that collaboration can be achieved and can help an organization to perform better and efficiently (Deutsch 1949, 1968; Drucker, 1959; Kraus, 1984). Others have identified a connection between collaborative or cooperative work when in a group versus team structure (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Bennis, 1997; Greenbaum & Query,

1999). This dissertation observed that collaboration among the workgroups in the two newsrooms was attainable if the responsibilities, the news artifacts and the journalistic judgment of what is newsworthy are shared by each workgroup member. The dependency of the workgroup members on each other to post a headline or story, to give suggestions or ideas for a story package, and accessing and producing online materials at the same time during the news production process allowed each member to have an equal stake in the tasks without instituting a hierarchical form of work. Thus, the importance of collaboration in the workgroup structure of these two cases illustrates that news production work can be a joint effort across skill set and experience of the individual members and can be attained when the tools and resources are open to all at the same time in the same place, and when members depend on each other for completion of tasks and responsibilities.

#### **6.5 THEORETICAL AND OBSERVATIONAL FINDING 4: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE BY DEPENDENCY AND COMMUNICATION ILLUSTRATED**

Fourth, organization culture can be identified by the level of dependency (collectivism/individualism) (Hofstede, 1980) that members in the organization have on each other, as well as explicit and implicit (high-and low-context) (Hall, 1976) communication used by the members in the organization; this can be illustrated by the observations made of the two newsrooms in this study. Scholars have made connections between the dependency that members have on each other in an organization and the form of indirect communication with each other in order to complete work (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Gudykunst, Matsumoto, et.al. 1996; Kim, 1994; Singelis & Brown

1995). In addition, the organizational and business management literature has shown connections between workgroups, collective activity, and individualism and/or collectivism in the workplace (Earley, 1993; 1994; Moorman & Blakely, 1995; Wagner, 1995; Eby & Dobbins, 1997). This dissertation supported that in the two newsrooms, the online news workgroups members had a different level of dependency on each other and a different form of communication with each other. The two newsrooms supported characteristics of the collectivistic and individualistic culture as well as the high-and low-context communication, but certain attributes were more prominent than others. Thus the online news workgroup members of *The Chicago Tribune* were more individualistic and used low-context communication with each other, whereas the online news workgroup members of *El Norte* were more collectivistic and used high-context communication. However, both newsrooms had online news workgroups that worked collaboratively and showed several attributes to support a collectivistic culture. As Triandis (1995) stated, no culture has only one or the other, but a combination of the two. Thus, this dissertation showed in these two cases that a collectivistic, high-context culture was attainable for collaborative news production processes countering the individualistic, hierarchical structure findings found in previous studies on the news production process of the newsroom (White, 1950; Geiber, 1956; Snider, 1967; Bantz, McCorkle & Baade, 1977; Gans, 1979). Also, the form of communication in newsroom workgroups previously were not investigated in journalism literature only at the team level and these studies showed communication issues were common among team members (Neuzil, Hansen & Ward, 1999; Hansen, Neuzil & Ward, 1999; Endres, Schierhorn & Schierhorn, 1999). So, this dissertation has given additional insight into how forms of communication that include

context and meaning can impact the work done among groups of journalists in these two newsrooms. So the importance of the level of dependency and of communication the members have with each other contributes to the completion of the daily news production process daily. These two cases show that with more dependency among the members, a form of indirect, contextual and meaningful communication supports a collaborative environment where news work flows efficiently.

#### **6.6 THEORETICAL AND OBSERVATIONAL FINDING 5: COLLABORATION FACILITATES ACCURATE, COMPREHENSIVE NEWS**

Last, the newsroom culture impacts the collaborative work produced and supports the accuracy and context achieved with the news posted on the website. Scholars have identified that the Internet and its attributes for being 24/7 create ethical issues regarding speed and space, when to post news, as well as how much information to include with the story on the site (Christians, 1998; Pavlik, 1999; Deuze & Yeshua, 2001). This dissertation illustrated in these two newsrooms the importance placed on accuracy and on context when posting news stories to the website. The online news workgroup members in both newsrooms were careful not to post information until it was verified; and they were careful in what additional resources and information they uploaded to the site without a careful review and judgment as to its trustworthiness and timeliness in its applicability to the story. The two newsrooms also understood that the news content in which they worked was always in development; this notion (that the story is never done) made the online news workgroup members revisit content to make sure it remained accurate and was the most comprehensive information available. In addition, the online

news workgroup members at *El Norte* and *The Chicago Tribune* shared access to the content they worked with. When facts, accuracy or information was missing, they would speak up and would communicate to their workgroup members. Thus, these two cases show the importance of collaborative work and the opportunity it creates for the online staff members to identify errors and additional resources or information for stories, ensuring accuracy and contextuality for the news citizen. The focus is not on the who, but on the story. This is supported in these two cases when a collaborative news production process is in place, placing the focus where it should be in journalism – the news story. The next section will discuss the empirical major findings from this study and how they can be explained from the larger perspective of the journalism field.

#### **6.7 EMPIRICAL FINDING 1: WORKING ALONE IS NOT AN OPTION**

As the researcher observed, conducted interviews, and reviewed documentation for this study, she realized that the online news workgroups at both news organizations require a different work structure to complete their work. As mentioned earlier in the dissertation, the online news workgroups work with a variety of multiple resources, artifacts and people over the course of the day to get news posted successfully on the site. The online news workgroup members cannot work alone because the multiple tasks and items needed for a news story on the site require a collaborative effort. If a collaborative work environment did not exist in these two newsrooms, the online news staff members would not know where, how, when, and why to post and to present the news story. Thus, the online newsroom requires the work of several journalists at the same time, on similar tasks, to get the story finished. This collaborative work environment newsroom may have existed in the news organization but the opportunity of its use or recognize it may not

have been given much thought before. This begs the question of whether the individualistic way of doing journalism actually exists.

This study showed that the group could readily be identified in the newsroom and how collaboration can be observed within this group. As a result, the individual way of doing journalism does exist, because we can identify it in the profession and in studies based on how the journalist does newsgathering and reporting on his or her own. This study argues that - for those of us in the academy and in the profession - we may need to expand our notion of group work and collaboration into how journalism is performed.

The opportunity to identify the group in the newsroom always has been there, but in the academy we have not closely examined it because journalism culture at least in the U.S. media system, always has been focused at the individual level because of the way that the newsgathering, the reporting, the editing, and the publishing process has been studied. It makes sense that we analyze the news production process from this lens, but this study helps to demonstrate how collective work can be identified in the newsroom from these two cases.

For example, several variations of online news workgroups were identified at the *El Norte* and *The Chicago Tribune*. At the time of this study, the researcher identified six different workgroups (groupings of three or more online journalists working together such as producers, designers, and reporters) at *The Chicago Tribune* and nine different workgroups at *El Norte*. These workgroups would change in number, task, role and objectives depending on the news content they had to work with. These workgroups also came together naturally and informally. Identifying these groups in how they

communicate and how they work together can contribute to the existing scholarship of how journalists work together in the newsroom.

So, the individual way of doing journalism does exist, but if we want to continue to look at how the journalism industry best can be improved for the future, as well as measured globally across several media systems and cultures, it is to our benefit to examine the group structure as this study has done. It is a benefit because it helps to identify another form of understanding the culture, the structure, and the management of the newsroom and its journalism practices that utilize a common organizational unit of a group identifiable in any newsroom, regardless of country or culture. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, literature from several other fields showed the effectiveness of the group structure in the organization and its impact on the group's performance and outcome. Among those of us in the academy and in the profession, the recognition of a collaborative news environment in a once-considered individualistic work structure may long be overdue.

## **6.8 EMPIRICAL FINDING 2: ACCURATE AND COMPREHENSIVE NEWS VIA THE COLLECTIVE**

The next major empirical finding in this study showed that a collaborative news production process results from a form of collective knowledge attained from numerous contributions given by the online news workgroup members who have various skill sets and backgrounds to lend their ideas, suggestions and clarifications to a story. This collective knowledge from the online news workgroup helps with the accuracy and the context achieved with the stories posted to the website. If this collaborative news

production process did not exist in these two newsrooms, errors or inaccuracies could occur and could create a lack of context for their posted stories. This begs the question of whether collaboration leads to intellectual diversity among the journalists, allowing them to verify information and provide additional information and context to the stories they publish on the website.

This study not only has shown how the collective knowledge of the journalists in the online newsroom was able to contribute to the collaborative news production process, but also demonstrated how the group effort and contributions from each member allowed for a more accurate and contextual story than that of an individual journalist. The multiple contributions from the members created an environment supporting intellectual diversity. In this study, accuracy and context are supported through this collaborative production process and are not interfered with, allowing the journalistic principles to remain through this diverse and collective environment in these two newsrooms.

Previous scholarship in this area has shown journalistic principles in the online newsroom environment to be a challenging area in terms of newsgathering and reporting because of the speed, efficiency, and agility required of the journalists to post website content as quickly as possible (Christians, 1998; Deuze & Yeshua, 2001; Zaragoza, 2002; Singer, 2003; Singer 2006). However, this study shows that the journalistic principles still apply; the staff members know they must post news as it happens but remain cautious in when and what information they post.

Scholars have addressed the importance of and the need for new ethics and principles for the online news environment and for challenges we have yet to fathom

(Christians, 1998; Pavlik, 1999; Deuze & Yeshua, 2001). This study contributes another element to the scholarship and shows that the journalists in these two newsrooms during breaking news situations handle the content they receive with the same ethics and principles that have been the foundation for their print counterparts. The question may not be whether to create and to develop new principles, but how we can support and adhere to the existing principles. Thus the intellectual diversity that can be achieved from a collective effort of workgroup members reviewing a story for inaccuracies or giving suggestions for additional resources may help to support journalistic principles in these two newsrooms.

### **6.9 EMPIRICAL FINDING 3: NATIONAL VERSUS PROFESSIONAL CULTURE**

The other empirical finding in this study are based on the cultural differences identified in the two news organizations. The newsrooms in this study were compared to see how two different countries and cultures perform their online journalism practices. Comparative research aims to find similarities, differences, and other patterns relating to the research questions or hypotheses presented. This dissertation showed that the two newsrooms had several similarities in supporting a collaborative work environment, yet had very different organizational, journalistic and national cultures. Despite these cultural differences, identifying the journalism in both newsrooms was achieved without making any cultural imperialistic judgments regarding the superiority of one newsroom over another. The focus was in explaining the collaborative news production process in both newsrooms and how this can impact the news content produced and posted on the

website. So, one wonders whether the cultural variability of these two newsrooms shed light on any journalistic practices, for better or for worse.

The cultural variability of the two newsrooms in this study shows how journalism is done in only these two news organizations in the United States and Mexico.

Comparative research expands existing notions of observed patterns we may identify within countries and allows us to apply our research questions and hypotheses in other cultures in order to test their validity and reliability. In some cases, it breaks existing notions or helps attain clarity in idea formation toward knowledge in that area. Thus, this study demonstrates how the cultural variability of the collectivistic and high-context communication characteristics in the *El Norte* newsroom help to support how stories were verified and how they were given context by the staff's group effort. Through the rich, embedded communication, the online staff worked collaboratively to post news on the site and to continually post its most accurate version.

On the other hand, the individualistic and low-context communication characteristics in *The Chicago Tribune* newsroom also helped to support how stories were verified and how they were given context by the staff in this model as well. Through the abrupt and concise communication, (i.e. "I'm updating," "I fixed,") the online staff worked collaboratively, albeit at times individualistically, to post validated, accurate news on the site.

Overall, the results illustrate the workplace that best facilitated collaborative work among the journalists to make the news accurate and comprehensive was in the collectivistic, high-context communication culture identified in the *El Norte* online newsroom. This study may infer that the collectivistic, high-context communication

culture characteristics are more apparent in the Mexican than United States culture, thus allowing for collaborative work to be more likely to occur and be nurtured in this kind of environment.

Also, interestingly, even though these two newsrooms shared similar experiences in the training of their journalists (*The Chicago Tribune* journalists were trained in journalism practices and techniques from the United States; the owner of *El Norte* received a graduate degree from the United States and this influenced many of his decisions in operating the organization and in the past, *El Norte* journalists were trained via a U.S. professor making annual summer visits to the newsroom on journalism practices and techniques), the national culture still was a stronger influence in the newsroom over the journalistic culture in how they communicated with each other and their level of dependency on each other while doing their news work.

This study provides insight into what journalism practices can be and how they fit into different cultures. The professionalism of the journalists in both newsrooms demonstrated that professionalism helps guide their communication with each other and their ethical judgments in what news is published. However, the cultural variability in both newsrooms contributes to how much the journalists depend on each other to complete the collaborative work required in the online news production process. Thus, the combination of the professionalism, as well as the culture of each newsroom, contributes to the implemented journalism practices. But the measure of whether these different journalism practices are for the better or worse is not the question, because these practices and routines show that they produce a form of journalism appropriate for their

respective publics. The focus is how accurate and contextual forms of journalism are achieved in two newsrooms, despite the media system of that particular country.

In summary, this section provides the empirical findings of how two newsrooms incorporate the group structure into the newsroom, the intellectual diversity possible among journalists when work is collaborative, and how this can be examined cross-nationally in different media systems and cultures. The next section will describe the implications of the findings for the profession and the academy.

#### **6.10 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NEWSROOM**

News organizations around the world are undergoing a transformation in how journalists work in the newsroom and how they present and post news content to their news websites. This study illustrated that cultural variability exists between the two newsrooms, *El Norte* and *The Chicago Tribune* by the culture and communication used among the online news workgroup members. Studies examining the cultural variability in journalism scholarship have been limited thus far. Of the conducted studies, many were limited by geography (i.e. Europe and the United States) and methodologies (i.e. surveys and questionnaires). Most of these studies looked at what represents the journalistic profession in a particular country and/or region and its implications on the news produced. Some of the most well-known comparative studies in journalism are surveys of the journalism profession. This study can now be added to the existing scholarship by giving two case studies of observed actions and behaviors of journalists in two different countries and the ways in which journalism and media systems can be examined cross-

nationally in comparative research. The study adds information to our understanding of how two newsrooms operate by explaining how the journalists work and communicate, particularly in online news workgroups working to produce accurate and contextual website content. The study also gives explanations on how the news production process works among the online news workgroup and the way this is supported in the organizational culture.

At the heart of this study is the role that collaboration plays in the news production process and how it contributes to the routines in daily news processes. Business management literature has shown support of collaborative processes in the organization and how these processes work successfully in the workgroup structure, depending on the culture of the workplace. This study has illustrated the news organization has a culture with a collaborative work process among workgroups of journalists in the newsroom.

Table 6.1: Transformations in the newsroom and their potential outcomes

<b>Transformation type</b>	<b>Positive outcome</b>	<b>Negative outcome</b>
Deliberated news judgments	Diversity of contributions; Multiple reviews for errors or inaccuracies to be found; Multiple reviews for story to become comprehensive with additional resources considered;	News process is hampered; News is not posted as quickly;
Workgroups with multiple goals and tasks to achieve	Motivated, loyal, dependent staff; Workflow efficiencies that lead to quality in news product; Inspires other workgroups to form;	Difficulty in meeting objectives; Difficulty in concentrating on multiple tasks;
Open tools and resources are via virtual or online access	Diversity of contributions; Identification of errors or inaccuracies to be found; Communication flow among staff improves;	Hampers speed of decision-making or news production; Loss of control and management of the routines and systems in place;

Some of the direct implications of this collaborative news production process are the negative and the positive outcomes of how news content is presented and is posted to the site. These are summarized briefly in Table 6.1 above. The negative outcomes include content that may be rushed and therefore result in mistakes published as the result of the workgroup members rushing to post the story without considering if it contains all the facts or information. The ability to make timely and quality journalistic judgments may be hampered when the collaboration between workgroup members flows to the point in that they may not question each other's judgment or may feel pressured as a whole group by the potential breakneck speed of the Internet. However, the positive outcomes include

the diversity of the contributions by each online news workgroup member that helps a news story become more accurate by the multiple reviews by online news workgroup members. These multiple reviews of the content by several staff members make it easier for errors, inaccuracies, and missing information or details to be found. In addition, a news story can become more comprehensive through the contributions by each online news workgroup member adding resources and content to a story as it develops. The same applies when the story is complete and posted on the site. Because the Internet makes it possible for information to be changed any time, the online staff members work with news content that is never finished because another piece of information or resource can always be added to it. This is just one way collaboration can impact the news being produced.

In addition, newsrooms may find that the collaborative news production process may work better than previous organizational structures that sought to achieve the same outcome. For instance, instead of grouping the online journalists into teams usually given one goal or task to accomplish - a strategy used in the print newsroom with inconsistent results - management could consider placing the online journalists into groups. For example, a group can consist of designers, producers, and reporters of the online newsroom, as the researcher observed in the two newsrooms. This kind of group (designers, producers, and reporters) allows the journalists to focus on how multiple stories will be covered, presented, and published on the site. No longer are the online journalists organized by team with a single goal, but a group with multiple goals (e.g. update the homepage four times an hour with news to maintain currency and relevancy) and tasks (e.g. create a new template for the videos on the site, create instructions for the

staff on how to make a blog post, etc.) to complete and this makes a difference in the group's performance in the areas of communication, cooperation, and collaboration of multiple tasks and resources. This structure may impact the long-term goals for the online newsroom staff and the news organization for the better: A motivated, loyal, dependent group of staff members could develop, as well as a productive news workflow that accounts for efficiencies and quality in the news published. Having such a group and workflow can make it more likely that news passes through the appropriate checks and balances (i.e. journalistic routines and ethical considerations). For example, this can be achieved when the journalists are dedicated to serving the public and the news organization in making sure that the most accurate news is being posted on the site and taking the time to assure its accuracy. As part of this, the journalists depend on each other in the newsgathering and production stage, thus supporting a cooperative environment that rewards collective achievements. This also is achieved in part when an established routine exists to put a story through several points of verification with editors before it is published on the site.

Second, making the tools and resources open to everyone in the newsroom with virtual or online access (i.e. online content management system or private chat room) may contribute to a more collaborative process. If the content management system is open to several group members at once, the story can be reviewed by several members before it gets posted. This may hamper the speed at which decisions are made at time of publication, but this delay facilitates ensuring the most accurate story versus being the first to publish the story. In addition, this review by multiple members may help find missing information or inaccuracies. There is no guarantee that this always would

happen, but if the system was open and the practice common (likely when the journalists are automatically sent the information to review each piece before it is published versus an automatic upload of the content to the website), it can become a collaborative routine. Also, if a communication system, such as instant messenger, is set up as a universal chat room for all the online group members to access, they can be aware of news production and contribute accordingly throughout the day. This may be structured, for example, by informing all online group members to monitor and contribute to the chat room throughout the day. It could be included as part of their job responsibility and editors could perhaps assign and rotate groups of three members to contribute at specific time slots (i.e. 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., and so forth). A universal chat room, textual in format, can succeed versus in-person or phone communication because the chatroom documents the communicated information and creates less confusion than when information is given orally. When information is given orally, the person may not understand nor see the context related to the information being communicated and whether it is relevant or applicable. Also, when information is given orally, it may be difficult to know if the other person is using correct spelling or grammar without seeing it written. These two aspects were directly observed in the two newsrooms in this study and may be potential recommendations for other newsrooms. Consideration of making the tools and resources open to everyone contradicts existing studies in journalism scholarship identifying that control and management over systems and routines helps the news get produced and published (White, 1950; Breed, 1955; Geiber, 1956; Matejko, 1967; Soloski, 1989). The environment that controls and manages the news production systems and routines places the decision-making and communication flow among the

journalists with only a select few who have the power that prevents an open and shared structure of tools and resources among the journalists. However, this study looks differently at the structure and the organization to show how opening access to these resources helps the flow of communication among the journalists, which ultimately helps either to support or hinder a collaborative process intrinsically helpful to the production and the publication of online news.

For news organizations that do not have (nor facilitates) a collaborative work environment but want to, management should consider starting small. Experiment with having a small workgroup within the news organization to come together informally to research and experiment new ideas or methods of producing and presenting news on the Website. For example, have a workgroup access a database of useful information (that could later be accessed by the public) and share the data to create several forms of mashups (open to everyone in the group) with which to modify and test before launching. Starting with a small group can serve as the impetus to motivate others to join and/or inspire others to create their own workgroups for collaborative projects.

Another suggestion would allow the change agents or de facto, unofficial leaders in the news organization (they are not the editors, managers or those in formal leadership positions per se) to have the freedom to create (as well as innovate) in their work. It would also help to allow them the opportunity to do this kind of brainstorming and creative thinking with journalists in other departments and sections of the news organization. The hidden leaders can act as conduits of collaborative work processes that spread to other members in the organization. However, once the method has grown within the news organization from the bottom up, management should nurture it by

allowing groups to be informally structured, flexible, and fluid. Management also should nurture the values and beliefs of loyalty to others versus to the self, the importance of the greater good for the group, and that dependency on others not only is accepted but highly welcomed in the organization.

## **6.11 IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

In addition, to extend this research to the theoretical ties mentioned in the second chapter, the following will detail how connections to the organizational classical, modern, systems and cultural theories; teams and group behavior; collaboration research; and journalism scholarship in the areas of professionalism and routines.

In terms of classical and modern theory, this study suggests that an organization not only operates by a set of goals as well as processes and functions of labor, but also includes individuals' contribution to the work during production and implementation – whether it is a product or service, and this makes each organization unique. This is contradictory to the findings by classical scholars such as Taylor (1911) and Weber (1922) who identified a linear, production-based, and closed system of how an organization works that excludes the individual from the workflow of the organization. This contradicts the findings of modern scholars such as Davis and Lawrence (1977) and Mintzberg (1979), who found structures and models to measure and to chart the workflow of the organization that could be applied to any organization.

Thus, this study shows individuals - or more importantly - groups within the organization can greatly influence and contribute to how work is performed and how they

collaborate. Also, organizations cannot be put into one model or form because they are unique, because of the individuals in the organization. This social aspect of how the organization operates contributes greatly to what the organization does and how it performs. For future research, scholars using the classical and modern approaches to investigating an organization – particularly in a newsroom - cannot isolate variables at the production and workflow level, but must include the variables of individuals or groups in the workplace. This would be examining a phenomena only half-way. The production and workflow level requires the connection to the people who participate in the production and workflow process; without the people, the product or service would never be achieved. People are crucial to the process.

As for systems theory, the two newsrooms show that an organization adapts during workflow processes - but also that the organization adapts based on the values and beliefs of the members in the organization as well as on the embedded history of the organization. This contradicts to Thompson (1967) and Katz and Kahn (1996), who identified that an organization adapts to the environment because of internal and external factors but not because of the culture.

Thus, the findings illustrate that organizations adapt, but not only because of the processes and the systems in place (because of internal (i.e. relocation of departments or desks) and external (i.e. marketplace) factors): but also because of the individuals in the organization and of the beliefs and values. As a result, this human factor contributes to the role collaboration has in the organization.

For future research in this area, scholars may want to consider - when investigating the newsroom and how journalists collaborate - the human factors. In

addition to studying the internal and external factors that contribute to the complexity of an organization and how it operates, the human element is critical as well.

As for organization cultural theory, this study suggests that the organization's culture identifies how collaboration works in the newsroom by the norms, the values and the beliefs embedded in the organization and where it fits within the structure and the system of newswork. These findings contribute to the works of Schein (2004), who found that culture helps to identify how an organization survives, grows and adapts. This study adds to it by showing how to identify the culture of the two news organizations by how dependent the employees are on each other and the form of communication (extent of meaning and context) they use when interacting. Hofstede (1980) found that organizations have a culture influenced by its national culture. This study adds to it by showing how the national culture of the two news organizations is identifiable by how the employees behave, think, as well as the values and beliefs they bring to the workplace. Also, this study contributes to Hall (1976), who identified that organizations have a culture based on inner communication: this study shows how the extent of meaning and context used by the members of the workgroups contributes to the form of collaboration they use in producing news for the website. Thus, the implications are that future research to identify culture - may be a matter of scholars investigating not only the norms, beliefs and values of the individuals in the organization but also the form communication and the level of dependency among organization's members. These aspects (norms, beliefs, values, communication and group cohesion) are important to knowing how individuals in the organization make meaning in the work and the contribution of this work to the organization and society.

In terms of groups and team behavior, this study suggests that workgroups help in the outcomes of a service and/or product in an organization. The extent of the outcome is contributed by how collaborative the members are in accomplishing the service or product requested. This finding contradicts Janis (1971), who found that groups may worsen performance or lead to poor decision-making as a result of collective contributions and groupthink. Other scholars also with contradictory findings include Katzenbach and Smith (1993), Osburn, Moran, Musselwhite, Zenger and Perrin (1990), who found that the structure of teams (instead of groups) helped an organization operate and perform. Yet, this study of the two newsrooms illustrates support in other scholarly work, such as Mayo (1933), who found the individual does not work alone and must be part of a group in order for the organization to operate. In addition, this study adds to the findings of Bennis (1997), who showed that the group performed better at tasks than individuals. The cases show how groups of individuals are able to produce a complex service to the public (of providing timely and relevant news) that is accurate, verified, and comprehensive as the result of multiple contributions from the group. Both Mayo (1933) and Bennis (1997) may benefit from this study's findings that groups add information on how communication (context and meaning) as well as the dependency levels of group members in the organization contribute to how people behave and perform in an organization when they work as a group. Thus, this study's findings illustrate that future research should not consider isolating the unit of analysis at the individual level, but should include the unit of analysis at the group level because organizations operate with this structure as well. If scholars do so, the ability to identify the behaviors of the individuals in the group and their collaboration within and outside of

the group may more readily be observed, meaning that scholars can recognize how members in an organization work together and perform.

As for collaboration research, the current study illustrates that the form of collaboration is identifiable in the workgroup, yet it will differ in consistency from organization to organization, based on how dependent members are to each other in their responsibilities as well as whether the tools and resources are open and shared. This study contributes to the findings by Evans and Wolf (2005), who identified collaboration as achievable when collaborative technology is deployed, work is visible to everyone, and encouraging group versus individual structures in the organization. Because of the support in this study of a collaborative technology used by the journalists, the news content was visible to all online news workgroup members as they worked on it; and to accomplish news tasks, they depended on each other to help get the news posted to the site. This study also contributes to Kraus (1984), who identified collaboration as attainable in the organization when employees have shared power, operate within an open system, and foster interdependence with each other. This study showed that the online journalists shared the access and decision-making to what is posted on the Website, they used tools and resources that were open and accessible to all, and they needed to depend on each other in order for the content to be posted (i.e. updating a page while encoding a video and making an interactive map to go with it).

So this study of the two newsrooms may help future research for scholars who want to identify collaboration in the organization by looking at the workgroup and who understand that there may not be one specific form of universally applicable collaboration, but that it will differ with each organization. For example, this will help in

our knowledge of the complexities of digital work organizations such as the online newsroom that require multiple resources and individuals to achieve a service or task. The identification and forms of collaboration in these work environments will be helpful for scholars.

In terms of journalism research, particularly in the areas of professionalism and routines, this study suggests that journalists can work together in the newsroom, as opposed to individually, but the culture must support collaborative work for this to occur. This means that journalists should not be fearful to share or cooperate with their colleagues; if the culture nurtures and accepts this over time, the idea of journalists being collaborative in their news work will become common and recognized. In turn, this collaborative work environment must support open and shared resources, tools, and routines that make it possible for the journalists to work together. These findings contradict those found by scholars such as Breed (1955), Matejko (1967), and Soloski (1989), who found that the self-interests and independent nature of the journalist contributes to the kind of professionalism and routines that are practiced in the newsroom. This study also illustrated that a shared and collective responsibility among the workgroup determined the news published. This may imply that the existing tenets of professionalism and media routines may exclude a group structure and a horizontal decision-making process. This also is contradictory to what has been found by White (1950), Geiber (1956), Snider (1967), Bantz, McCorkle and Baade (1977), and Gans (1979) of a hierarchical, assembly-line process for news production where specific individuals have the control to decide what and when news is published. The current study also implies that the power of one journalist over others is not the norm in the

digital workplace, where access to resources is open and shared and the layers of work require multiple people to perform tasks together at the same time.

Thus, this study of the two newsrooms illustrates that scholars should consider that the hegemonic routines of news production may be revisited by considering how journalists work together in groups versus individually. This can be revisited by going into newsrooms of various media such as broadcast, radio, magazine and print to see how the journalists work daily and if they work together as a group.

Also, scholars may not only want to consider investigating the technologies and the resources used in the newsroom, but also to examine the culture to determine if a collaborative work environment is replicable in another news organization. An organization can have technologies and resources to make work open and shared, but if the environment is not conducive to sharing and cooperation, collaborative work may not be as easily achieved. Sharing and cooperation are directly tied to communication. Communication helps to facilitate collaboration. If journalists are able to communicate with each other either indirectly or directly (high- or low-context communication) and have an understanding for context and meaning in their language as they work, their ability to share and cooperate will occur naturally. For example, an orchestra may have the latest musical instruments to make a high-quality piece of classical music, but if the environment does not support cooperation among the musicians (where they can communicate with each other with the appropriate context and meaning) the symphony will not be collaborative and the music will not sound as well.

Thus, scholars should search for whether all facets of the organization and the collaborative environment are nurtured in other news organization as it was in the two

newsrooms in this study. These two cases may be unique in supporting a collaborative work environment because their organizational culture allows for the shared, collective responsibilities among the journalists to be more likely than they would in another news organization.

## **6.12 IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH FROM RELATED FIELDS**

Extending this research theoretically into other fields such as organizational, business management, group communication, and cultural studies may be achieved by looking at the works of Hofstede (1980), Wenger (1998), and Straubhaar (2007). The collaborative news production process can be investigated by applying the other areas of cultural variability by Hofstede that include other dimensions of power distance, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980). Each of these other dimensions could be a separate study. The dimension of power distance is the measure of the inequality of power between an individual and those in authority, while masculinity and femininity measure the biological difference in individual socialization by levels of assertiveness and nurturing; uncertainty avoidance examines the level of tolerance individuals have for uncertainty (Hofstede, 1980). Each is a dimension rich with its own set of social science literature detailing how to measure national cultures from these perspectives. It would not be fair to scholars nor to these dimensions to try to cover all in this dissertation without giving an extensive book-length review.

Another theoretical usage of this study could incorporate the application of the conceptualizations and framework of this meta theory to help describe and explain a

meta-theory, a theory of a set of theories of a community of practice by Wenger (1998). This meta-theory could be applied to the collaborative news production process by looking at the online journalists as the community of practice - i.e., as a group with members continuously working within a specific practice. The practice transforms constantly by members communicating and participating within the group to perform the required tasks together. The most basic characteristics of a community of practice include mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). Mutual engagement is defined by an environment that welcomes engagement of members, seeks diversity in contribution, and forms of mutual relationships (Wenger, 1998, p.73). Joint enterprise is defined as the collective process of negotiating information, ideas and artifacts within an environment of mutual agreement among members (Wenger, 1998, p.77). The shared repertoire is defined as the routines, words, ways of doing things that the community produces, and makes it a part of the practice (Wenger, 1998, p.83). In addition to these three aspects of a community of practice, the meta-theory also includes aspects of learning, boundaries and participation. As applied to online journalism, the online newsroom of journalists can be considered a community of practice, with a specific practice and members continuously working within that practice. The practice constantly transforms by members communicating and participating within the group together to perform the required tasks of producing content for the site. The synchronization of these tasks is more highlighted in the community of practice in which the learning, the negotiation of identities, and participation or non-participation occurs at the same

time. The levels of engagement by the individuals demonstrate how the online newsroom communicates, develops, and evolves.

Thus, the community of practice meta-theory can shed additional light onto how and to what extent collaboration occurs in the newsroom. This meta theory can help to explain the journalist in the newsrooms a group in continual learning and development in producing news and explain to what extent collaboration occurs in the newsroom. This approach is different from the one used in this study because the meta theory focuses on the organizational culture of learning in the online newsroom and how it evolves over time. The current study focuses on the current organizational culture of the online newsroom and how the online news workgroup communicates and collaborates during one moment in time.

Lastly, as part of this research is a cross-national study of United States and Mexican media systems, an investigation could be done on the identity of online journalists by applying the theoretical framework of a multi-cultural identity (Straubhaar, 2007). Straubhaar (2007) identifies a multi-layer cultural identity in explaining the relationship between culture and public television-viewing from the standpoint of hybridity, and how it synthesizes multiple layers. He proposes a model with multiple layers and levels within multiple cultures that explain the television-viewing culture. “In this process of learning from others, people form multiple layers of cultural capital, often specific not only to a field of activity as Bourdieu (1984) would predict, but to different subcultures or cultural layers. People form different dispositions to be behave differently with various groups...So within individuals, multiple cultural capitals coexist, specific to different fields of interaction and activity...All of these different layers of identity,

culture, and even class habitus will have various connections to global, cultural linguistic, national, local spaces and forces. (Straubhaar, 2006, p.14).” This same concept can be applied to the online newsroom and journalist. The scholar can examine the role of the journalist within the complex system of the newsroom and analyze how is the role is influenced by the multiple cultures that cross professional, media, local, and global boundaries. This theory would help to state how the journalist in the online newsroom has a combination of identities that contribute to the way in which he or she approaches the news, gathers and produces the news, and posts the news. For example, this might happen by showing how journalists in a Monterrey, Mexico, online newsroom will have a hybrid of identities that encompass how they conduct their daily work and influenced by their national Mexican culture, the regional culture, the culture of Monterrey, as well as the influences of the professional journalism culture and a media culture of print. These can impact how the journalist will gather his or her information and sources, the approach of the particular angle he or she has for writing the story, and the journalistic standards adhered to in completing the story and posting it to the Web. In summary, these suggestions for the profession and the academy are possible paths for pursuing collaborative processes in the newsroom.

### **6.13 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Despite the numerous contributions of this study, there are limitations. First, this project is unable explain how *all* online newsrooms operate and function and how *all* journalists (nationally and internationally) perform their daily work. Obviously, this study cannot generalize. For example, news organizations with labor unions (such as the

Washington Post), may yield different results of how the journalists work together and collaborate in the newsroom when there is formalized structure of a group such as a union within the organization. This can imply more or less collaboration depending on the involvement of the journalists with the union within the organization.

Second, this study focuses on two newsrooms with different levels of integration between their online and print operations. At the time of the study, the *El Norte* online newsroom was integrated and placed within the print operations, whereas *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom was placed within the print operations but not fully integrated with them. This difference in integration can influence how collaboration is facilitated when both operations are joined together versus separate. The *El Norte* online newsroom is a model that helps to facilitate collaborative news work but this may be an effect of the level of integration the staff has with its print operation in comparison to *The Chicago Tribune*. The researcher kept this news structure in mind during the time of observation and made the focus of her study on just the online news unit of both the print and online news units to avoid any issues of integration and its influence on the collaborative news process which could make this easier or more difficult to discern and analyze. Another small factor includes the level of security at the online newsroom of *El Norte*. As mentioned in the fourth chapter, security is tight in this news organization. As a result of this tight security, it may be more likely that the staff joins together to work as a result of their bond to each other in protecting their lives as journalists in Mexico as a unit within this news organization. This is a general assumption that may be a small factor that contributes to the collaborative traits that are nurtured in this organizational culture.

Third, this study is limited because the ethnographic method used is subject to the researcher's observations and their understanding of the phenomena observed. However, this variability is somewhat overcome because the researcher utilized identical ethnographic methods from newsroom to newsroom to make the findings more reliable.

Fourth, this study is limited in its ability to fully capture the cultural differences among the journalists and their newsrooms in their respective culture. Some cultural differences that may have been missed include beliefs and attitudes of the staff members, as well as the symbolic meaning of some forms of communication and interactions unique to that newsroom and the Mexican culture. As the researcher is not a native of Mexico, the researcher may not have grasped all of the implicit verbal and nonverbal communication understood by an individual native to Mexico. However, the researcher's 15 years of Spanish-language training as well as her previous career and academic experiences with Mexican and Latin American culture helped her identify several cultural nuances in the Mexican culture. The cultural assumptions and nuances were kept in mind when she visited each newsroom to make sure that the findings were contextualized in their appropriate culture without bias.

Fifth, the identification of "We" and "I" in the documentation of both newsrooms does reflect a form of how the cultures are collectivistic or individualistic. However, interview transcripts that are part of the documentation may be more likely to support the use of the "I" form, since the interviews were one-on-one and the interviewees were asked questions of their perspectives and their role in the online newsroom. This can lead to the assumption that the form of "I" is more likely to be used in these instances. However, the researcher took this limitation into account and included other forms of

documentation, such as emails and memos, to help to identify other evidence of these terms being used in different contexts to show their validity.

Sixth, *The Chicago Tribune* online newsroom editor gave the researcher access to the paper's private chat room during the time of observation. However, the *El Norte* online newsroom editor did not give the researcher access to their private chat areas during the time of observation because of connectivity limitations and security concerns surrounding susceptibility of the internal *El Norte* system to hackers by using the researcher's access via an unprotected computer. As a result, this dissertation cannot provide examples of the messages that occurred in the chats. However, the researcher took account for this by observing the chats directly when sitting adjacent to the online news workgroup members. The researcher took notes of these chat exchanges but since they were not verbatim, the researcher did not include them in this study.

Finally, although some ethnographic studies have lasted months or years, this study was limited to four months because of finite time and resources. However, the researcher took account for this and spent 10 to 12 hours a day in the newsroom making observations. This significant amount of time can help the participant-observer become more embedded into the field site and can result in a higher level of observation data. However, this amount of time far transcends the typical four to five hours a day recommended for ethnographies. This can exhaust the researcher, who might fail to recognize data in the field site; or the researcher can become so embedded into the culture so as to miss details. The researcher kept these concerns in mind and took breaks throughout the day to refresh her mind and to avoid exhaustion, which allowed her to maintain her status of participant-observer in the field site.

This study could be improved by combining the findings from this study with other methods such as content analysis or surveys that could provide additional context to the collaborative news production process under investigation in both studies.

## **6.14 SUMMARY**

There are several opportunities to study the online newsroom and journalists. This study has shown one method of exploring questions and discovering new ones on this intellectual journey to understanding the transformation of journalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

At a time when several transformations (economic, technological and social) are underway in the global newsroom, this dissertation illustrates two examples of how an innovative structure of a collaborative news production process works and how that structure transforms the journalists' work on a daily basis. By some, this transformation may not be considered new as critics and scholars may argue that news organizations have always had a collaborative news production process – it takes a group to publish the print daily newspaper, to run a nightly half-hour newscast on the local network, or to air a radio news program. Prior to the 1990s and the inception of the online newsroom, scholars have identified that it takes multiple journalists to operate a news organization (Breed, 1955; Matejko, 1967; Soloski, 1989; Bantz, McCorkle, & Baade, 1977; Gans 1979). Yet, when we look closer at these existing notions of the news production process it has been a process that is individually-focused and done in isolation. The transformation currently happening in the newsroom makes the news production process collectively focused and not as isolated. Why? Because communication within and

between different departments of journalists and managers is no longer isolated but open to all in the organization. This is not to say that communication is what makes the organization, but it is a vital part of its function and part of the complicated relationship between multiple communicative processes in the organization (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). The communication channels in the newsroom are allowing for more people to converse, discuss and make decisions together than before. The vehicles to communicate with others in the news organization have expanded beyond what they used to be from just telephone and face-to-face to include email and instant messenger, thus creating more opportunities for journalists to reach out to each other and take part in the conversation. Communication facilitates the groups of journalists' ability to collaborate in the news production process. The open communication among various departments of journalists and management allows for conversations and discussions among the journalists that were never possible before because of the limitations and hierarchy. This can be exemplified by the examples of how instant messenger was used by the staff at the two online newsrooms in this study. As discussed in earlier chapters, the journalists at both online newsrooms used the instant messenger tool frequently to communicate within their workgroups about news content they were working on. As part of using this tool, journalists and editors within and from other online news workgroups were able to be a part of the conversation if they wanted to be. Thus, this opening of the communication within the newsroom is creating the opportunities for more journalists to collaborate together in the production of the news.

Knowing that communication has been the catalyst to the transformation, we can identify that the transformation by 1) the multiplicity of resources and involvement of

others in the news production process; 2) the creativity and innovation required in the news reporting and gathering stage; 3) the importance of accuracy and context; 4) the importance of synchronicity in the workplace; and 5) the role of digital tools and resources used in news work. Each will be explained.

First, the multiplicity of resources and involvement of others in the news production process is common in these two newsrooms. The online news workgroup members know that they cannot upload a news story to the website without multiple resources, people, and artifacts. The structure of being the only journalist to have the story idea, write the story, edit it and perhaps design it is not an option within the fast-paced online newsroom structure. Because of the structure of the Internet medium where space, speed and collective contributions are not only feasible but also suggested, the collaborative work environment for an online news workgroup is logical and smart. This is logical because the newsroom can take advantage of the contributions of the group over the individual to help with achieving quality in producing the news. Second, it is smart because the additional journalists involved in the process allow for more checks and balances on stories, assuring that the news being posted is meets journalistic tenets of accuracy, currency and relevancy for example. The multiple skills (in multimedia, programming, design in addition to writing) required for posting a news story online makes the challenge of doing it alone incomprehensible.

Second, this dissertation identified in the two newsrooms how creativity and innovation are required during news gathering and reporting. The online news workgroup members were constantly brainstorming ideas and suggestions for the stories they posted. Such was the case when the storm hit Chicago: the online news workgroup members of

*The Chicago Tribune* were instantly thinking of all the resources they could post online for the news citizen – from an online map to which users could submit reports of damage, to video showing affected areas to a list of phone numbers and hyperlinks for local utilities.

When the online news workgroup members of *El Norte* posted the story about the gas station murder, they instantly were thinking of all the resources available to post online for the news citizen – from a story to a video or photos from the scene. The online news workgroup members at *El Norte* had told the researcher that weeks prior to her arrival to the newsroom, a huge storm created massive flooding in Monterrey and the surrounding area. The online staff members received user-generated, cell phone videos (of people stuck in the floods or being washed away) that the online news workgroup members featured on the site with the coverage of the storm and flooding.

This dissertation demonstrates that the online journalists who work in these organizations make journalistic judgments of the who, what, when, where, why, and how but also creative and innovative judgments as to what additional media or resources to add to the story to help news citizens to make informed decisions in their daily lives. These creative and innovative judgments may require new ways of combining resources and artifacts or technology, such as an online map to which users can submit information. Managers and editors can cultivate this kind of innovative and creative judgment by asking their journalists to think one step beyond the usual, to think critically, and to consider all perspectives and give them fair opportunity before eliminating them. For example, asking the journalists: How this story can be understood from another angle?

What is the devil's advocate opinion to this story and its premise? How can we add additional resources (such as related links, related stories, and interactive map) that give additional views and perspectives to the story? This dissertation illustrates, in these two cases, how newsgathering and reporting processes are transforming to include these new forms of innovative and creative thinking.

Third, this dissertation identified the importance of accuracy and context in the online news environment. The influence of speed and space on the web poses a challenge for journalists to fully understand the implications of their actions when posting news and information. In this study, the journalists were aware of their actions in the sense that what information they posted was being read and decisions were being made (by the public) based on what they posted. As a result, the journalists in the two newsrooms took very seriously their responsibility of what information they posted and what they presented because of the implications. They deliberated in how they wrote the news summary, the headline and what additional pieces of information they added to the story and how this would help the story. However, this form of judgment and understanding may not necessarily be instilled in all newsrooms or among all journalists. This study aims to highlight this issue because the journalist's ability to post information quickly and without delay makes more than ever, the principle of being accurate and having information verified before it goes live important. News citizens have access to the news and information that journalists post immediately; and with the web, there is no control of distribution and delivery of the news online. Deuze and Yeshua (2001) state how journalists in some cases do not see the problem in fixing mistakes online until later, rather than immediately. This is a problem and a time for online journalists to recognize

the power of the web and its implications for upholding journalistic principles. In this dissertation, the online news workgroup members were aware of the responsibility of being accurate and of verifying information, and hesitated to post any questionable information on the website until they attained confirmation. Also, the Internet's open space makes it easy for resources and information to be posted to a story. However, material online has a short lifespan and there is not enough room to keep everything online. A story or hyperlink may be here today but gone tomorrow. Also, the web makes it easy for anyone to self-publish – but the information they publish may or may not be true. Thus, validating information online is another critical part of the modern, online journalist's job. The journalist must decide what forms of resources and information can be included with a story, if they are timely and will not disappear, and if the information can be trusted.

In this dissertation, the two online newsrooms demonstrated that context was important and the staff members consistently sought ways to add valid resources and information to stories. When they did this, both online news workgroups would carefully identify and verify the information they received before posting it with the story. In many cases, the online news workgroup members had resources and information that came from within the news organization, so verifying the validity of the information took one less step to verify. Therefore, this dissertation identified how these two online news workgroups have journalists who adhere to standard principles of accuracy and context, but the ways in which they practice the principles now require some new tasks and responsibilities. Considering the newsroom, news organizations need to understand that how they approach, report, and present the news may require additional responsibilities

(i.e. multiple reviews of information before posting, continual updates to posted content, and so forth) and a critical eye (i.e. having the journalistic judgment to decide what remains to be verified).

Fourth, this dissertation identified the importance of synchronicity in the workplace. In an age where asynchronous work has become common because of the virtual workgroup and the home office, this dissertation has shown the opposite. Because of the 24/7 news environment and the need for information to be current and relevant on the Website at any given time in the day, the journalist synchronizes the news production process. This was demonstrated in the two online newsrooms by how often the online news workgroups worked together on the same story and posted the latest news and information to the website at the same time, together. These online news workgroups were in physical and online proximity to each other in the newsroom and had to post the news content as soon as possible. Therefore, this dissertation showed how the journalists in this workplace must work together in a temporal environment requiring them to work together on tasks together at the same time versus asynchronously. There is no other option in this 24/7 digital news environment.

Last, this dissertation also identified the importance of the digital tools and resources used by the online news workgroup members. Since these journalists need to access multiple resources at the same time throughout the day, the digital environment has made this access more feasible. This includes the virtual and online access to the content management system to upload news content, the instant messenger tool that allows them to communicate with each other regardless of proximity, and the applications to make an interactive map or slideshow of photos on the fly and post it to

the Website within a matter of minutes. In general, not only in this newsroom but in several organizations, the workplace has become digital – by making information, tools and resources available to anyone in the organization at any time. Because of this digital and connected environment, the ability exists now for people to work together even when on different computers in the same cubicle area or on a different floor. This was demonstrated by how the online news workgroup members could access the content management system and make changes to a news story at the same time in different areas of the newsroom. For instance, at *The Chicago Tribune*, the copyeditors could easily access the instant messenger tool and ask the online news workgroup members about the copy - without having to leave their desk. So, the digital workplace facilitates the ability for multiple people to access information together and work on it together in the same time and place, making collaboration possible in the workplace.

Considering journalism scholarship and organizational theory, scholars need to understand that their approach in selecting units of analysis for investigation in the newsroom organization (i.e. online journalists) requires a multi-faceted and complex set of criteria (i.e. culture, systems, processes, communication, and so forth) by which to document and analyze the studied phenomena. These areas are only a sample of the changes now under way in newsrooms around the globe. The future no doubt will hold many other forms of changes we cannot yet fathom. Newsrooms – and journalistic work – may never be the same.

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Guide for Field Site Visits (English)

1. How many years or months have you been working for the news organization?
2. How many years have you been working as a journalist?
3. What is your main role in the newsroom?
4. What are your daily routines or duties as part of that role?
5. What types of technology did you know (applications, hardware, software) before coming to the news organization? What types of technology did you learn after the job?
6. What three words best describe the environment of this newsroom?
7. How do you feel you contribute to the daily news production of the website?
8. What makes your online newsroom innovative?
9. What motivated you to join online journalism?
10. What vision do you have for this online newspaper? For the online news industry?
11. How initiatives by management are usually implemented in the newsroom?
12. What are the shared goals of the online staff?
13. How much autonomy does each staff member have? OR How much control is required of you? Hands-on mostly?
14. How much creativity is permitted on a daily basis?
15. What motivations exist daily for the staff?
16. What rewards exist daily for the staff?
17. Where are you from originally (city, country)?
18. Who do you identify as your competitors geographically (local to global)?
19. Who do you identify as your competitors by type (newspapers to radio)?
20. What forms of group work are you involved in daily?
21. How much are your deadlines tied to group work?
22. Do you have specific deadlines daily? What are they?

### **Interview Guide for Field Site Visits (Spanish)**

1. Cuántos años o meses ha trabajado para la organización periodística?
2. Cuántos años ha trabajado como periodista?
- 3.Cuál es su principal rol en la sala de redacción?
4. Cuáles son sus rutinas diarias u obligaciones como parte de ese rol?
5. Qué tipo de tecnología (aplicaciones, hardware, software) conocía antes de llegar a la organización periodística? Qué tipos de tecnología aprendió después del trabajo?
6. Con cuáles tres palabras describiría el ambiente en esta sala de redacción?
7. Cómo se siente de contribuir a la producción de noticias diarias del sitio web?
8. Qué hace innovadora a su sala de redacción online?
9. Qué lo motivó a hacer periodismo en línea?
10. Qué visión tiene para este periódico en línea? Para la industria de noticias en línea?
11. Cómo se implementan usualmente las iniciativas sobre manejo o gestión en la sala de redacción?
12. Cuáles con las metas comunes del personal que trabaja en línea?
13. Cuánta autonomía tiene cada miembro del staff o personal? O cuánto control se requiere de usted?
14. Cuánta creatividad se permite en la rutina diaria?
15. Qué motivaciones diarias hay para el personal?
16. Qué recompensas existen diariamente para el personal?
17. De dónde es usted originalmente (ciudad, país)?
18. A quiénes identifica como sus competidores geográficamente (local a global)?
19. A quiénes identifica como sus competidores por tipo o categoría (periódicos a radio)?
20. En qué formas de trabajo grupal está usted involucrado diariamente?
21. Qué tan ligados están sus “cierres” o fechas límites al trabajo grupal?
22. Tiene fechas límites o plazos diarios? Cuáles son?

## APPENDIX B

### Observation Guide

#### Global properties to be observed:

First, the global properties “are relatively objective, descriptive, and easily observable team characteristics. Global properties, such as team function, characterize the team as a whole” (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000, p.215). Thus, the items that will be observed for their global properties in the online newsroom include:

- The location of the group work in news production to the extent they are together or separate by floor, the department and the cubicle area of the building.
- The kind of group work done in news production to the extent of what text, audio, video, flash, graphics/art, photos are shared or not.
- The time of daily group budget meetings among the staff.
- The form of communication used in group work to the extent of email, instant messenger, telephone, in-person, or other forms of communication.
- The location and access of where group work in news production is worked on and saved via a file server, content management system, etc.

#### Shared team properties to be observed:

Second, the shared team properties “originate in experiences, attitudes, perceptions, values, cognitions, or behaviors that are held in common by the members of a team. Examples of shared team properties include team cohesion, team norms, team climate, and team mental models” (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000, p.215). Thus, the items that will be observed for their shared team properties in the online newsroom include:

- The time in which the group work in news production occurs to the extent of specific time periods such as morning/afternoon/evening shifts and/or across days such as Monday through Friday.
- The amount of statements made of *I versus We* in communication in the group.
- If news artifacts are treated as static items or developing items.
- If coworkers communicate they are a group, team or other in daily conversation.
- The facial expressions, movements, speed of interaction and location of interaction will be observed.
- The use of excessive talk or belaboring information or nondisclosing communication occurs will be observed.

**Configural team properties to be observed:**

Third, the configural team properties “capture the array, pattern, or variability of individual characteristics within a team....Examples include team interpersonal network density, team personality composition, and team age diversity” (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000, p.217). Thus, the items that will be observed for their configural team properties in the online newsroom include:

- The number of years the journalist has been working in that news organization.
- The number of years the journalist has been working in the industry.
- The motivation that drove them to become an online journalist.
- The number of projects they have worked on with a group.
- The form of web training received whether its formal classes, workshops, and/or on-their-own.
- The journalists’ country and city of origin.
- The competition the journalists identify with (geographically from local to global and media-based from newspapers to radio).

## **APPENDIX C**

Consent Form – English

**IRB APPROVED ON: 2/15/2008**

**EXPIRES ON: 2/13/2009**

**Title      The transformation of the newsroom: the collaborative dynamics of journalists' work**

IRB PROTOCOL #2007-02-0085

Conducted By: Amy Schmitz Weiss

Of The University of Texas at Austin:      *School of Journalism* Telephone: 512-471-1845

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time and your refusal will not impact current or future relationships with UT Austin or participating sites. To do so simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent for your records.

**The purpose of this study** is to observe and identify practices in online newsroom production.

**If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:**

- To allow me to observe your daily activities at work
- Answer any questions I may ask about your work during an interview or observation

**Total estimated time to participate** in study is minimal.

**Risks** of being in the study

- This observational study may involve risks that are currently unforeseeable. If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now or call the Principal Investigator listed on the front page of this form.

**Benefits** of being in the study is your contribution to describing the practices of online journalism.

**Compensation:** n/a

**Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:**

- The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.

The records of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation call the researchers conducting the study. Their names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about the research please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at (512) 232-2685 or the Office of Research Support and Compliance at (512) 471-8871 or email: [orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu).

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

## **APPENDIX D**

Consent Form – Spanish

**IRB APPROVED ON: 2/15/2008**

**EXPIRES ON: 2/13/2009**

**Título: La transformación de la redacción: la dinámica de colaboración trabajo de los periodistas**

IRB PROTOCOL #2007-02-0085

**Manejado por:** Amy Schmitz Weiss

Of The University of Texas at Austin: *School of Journalism*

Telephone: 512-471-1845

Se están pidiendo participar en una investigación. Este documento se ofrece información sobre el estudio. La persona a cargo de esta investigación también describirá este estudio y contestará a todas usted preguntas. Lea por favor la información abajo y haga cualquier pregunta que tengas antes de decidir si participas. Usted participación es enteramente voluntaria. Puedes rechazar participar sin perder beneficios. Puedes detener usted participación en cualquier momento y usted negación no afectará relaciones actuales o futuras con UT Austin o sitios que participen. Para hacerlo simplemente al investigador que desees. El investigador te proveerá una copia dile de este consentimiento para sus expedientes.

**El objeto de este estudio** es observar e identificar prácticas en la producción en línea de la redacción.

**Si acuerdas estar en este estudio, pediremos que hagas las cosas siguientes:**

- Participar permitir que observnos actividades diarias en el trabajo
- Responder a preguntas que acerca de usted trabajo durante una entrevista o una observación

**El tiempo estimado** para participar en estudio es mínimo.

**Riesgos** de estar en el estudio

- Este estudio de observación puede implicar riesgos que son actualmente imprevistos. Si desees discutir la información de arriba o cual quiera otros riesgos que puedas experimentar, puedes ahora hacer preguntas o llamar al investigador principal mencionado en la página delantera de esta forma.

**Los beneficios** de estar en el estudio son usted contribución a describir las prácticas del periodismo en línea.

**Compensación:** N/A

**Protecciones:** Los datos que resultan de usted participación se pueden poner a disposición de otros investigadores en el futuro para los propósitos de la investigación no detallados dentro de esta forma de consentimiento. En estos casos, los datos no contendrán ninguna información que se identifica o se asocie a él, o a usted participación en el estudio.

Los expedientes de este estudio serán almacenados con seguridad y mantenidos confidenciales. Las personas autorizadas de la universidad de Texas en Austin, miembros del comité examinador institucional, y (los patrocinadores del estudio, si cualquiera) tienen el derecho legal de repasar usted expedientes de la investigación y protegerán el secreto de esos expedientes hasta lo permitida por la ley. Todas las publicaciones excluirán cualquier información que permita identificarte. A través del estudio, los investigadores te notificarán de la nueva información que pueda llegar a estar disponible y que pudo afectar usted decisión para permanecer en el estudio.

**Contactos y Preguntas:**

Si tienes alguna preguntas o quieres retirarte sobre el estudio por favor hága la ahora. Si tienes preguntas más adelante, o quieres que la información adicional, de la participación los investigadores que conducen el estudio. Sus nombres, números de teléfono, y direcciones de E-mail están en la tapa de esta página. Si tienes preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante, quejas con preocupaciones, o de preguntas sobre la investigación sobre la investigación entrar en contacto por favor a Jody Jensen, Ph.D., de la universidad de Texas en el comité examinador institucional de Austin para la protección de temas humanos en (512) 232-2685 o la oficina de la ayuda de la investigación y de la conformidad en (512) 471-8871 o el email: [orisc@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:orisc@uts.cc.utexas.edu).

***Se darán una copia de esta información para usted expedientes.***

## APPENDIX E

Sample Excerpt from Jotting Report dated June 4, 2007

J001 6/4/07

9am budget meeting ends 9:16am

meeting in big conference room (glass windows; long table, trib photos on the walls)

\*\*\* leads meeting and brings laptop to show traffic and popular spots on the page thus far

top stories discussed from continuous news desk

photo stories

tv stations updates

announcement of 2 new Copy Editors \*\*\* today; \*\*\* nxt week

\*\*\* coming in summer and new video platform stated by \*\*\*

Workshop attended by \*\*\* on multimedia/photo; wants to inform staff about it

Multimedia mtg follows 9:16am; ends 9:30am

review the wknd budget and what's coming this week – book fair

asset list who's on it or not

coordination discussed for upcoming pckgs and confusion expressed

J002 6/4/07

6 mths ago integration happened with news editorial according to \*\*\*\*

now incorporated with news desks on 4<sup>th</sup> flr and out of morgue

J003 6/4/07

\*\*\*\* sits by the continuous news desk; \*\*\* by video, \*\*\* as producer; \*\*\* (intern sits across from \*\*\* desk; only intern for online)

\*\*\*names omitted to protect identities.

## APPENDIX F

Excerpt of sample field report  
\*\*\*names omitted to protect identities

Amy Schmitz Weiss  
6/4/07 9am-5pm shift (8 hours)  
Tribune

### **First Field Report (J001-J040)**

#### **Recording Conditions:**

Recording was done using my journal and what I could remember after leaving the field. No audio recordings were made at this time.

#### **Initial impressions:**

My impressions were nervous for entering this experience for the first time, I felt like I was starting back in 1996 all over again. It was a strange experience. I went to the building, went to the sign-in desk and was given a guest pass and instructed to take the second set of elevators to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor.....

#### **Phenomena Observed: (key events, significance/importance to others; asides go here. Group by sketches and episodes by number.)**

The key events I observed today were two aspects. One, the routine of the budget meetings. They have a 9am and 11am, 11:30am budget meeting... Second, the routine of checking information. I observed \*\*\* reviewing a multimedia package and identifying technical but also grammatical errors in her analysis of the package (see J019 6/4/07)....

#### **Obstacles to Research: (Commentary)**

I think some obstacles I will be facing are that this newsroom is now integrating with the print. They started this just six months ago with the innovation editor coming on board....

#### **Further Planning: (In-process memos)**

For the future, I need to pay more attention to the interactions, greetings, and common issues that arise in the group versus getting lost in minutiae.....

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## VITA

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