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by

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**ORGANIZING THE IMMATERIAL: EXAMINING THE COMMUNICATIVE
CONSTITUTION OF A CONGREGATIONALIST CHURCH**

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by

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“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

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This study investigates the relationship between faith, communication, and organization in a large Baptist church. A chief purpose of this study is to describe and interpret potential communicative dimensions and consequences of immateriality (e.g., faith-oriented influences) for organizations and their members. This investigation also interrogates organizational communication scholars' theoretical understandings of how communication constitutes complex organizations (McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Taylor & Van Every, 2000; see also Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). Toward this end, I conducted an extended case study of a large Baptist church. This research process was guided by descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative questions regarding (a) the nature and interplay of various discourses in the organization, (b) member interpretations and communicative consequences of these discourses, and (c) the implications for a communicative ontology of organizational constitution.

Data collection consisted of formal meeting observations, semi-structured interviews, and examination of multiple organizational documents that presumably

inform the church's organizational processes. In total, I observed 26 formal meetings (52 hours of observation), conducted 40 interviews with pastors, support staff, and lay leaders, and examined seven documents generated by the church and related institutional bodies. Two forms of analysis were employed to strengthen the case studying findings, an ethnographic discursive analysis of the meeting interactions and a narrative analysis derived largely from the interview data.

The ethnographic discourse analysis examines three communication codes that governed the organization's meeting interactions. I refer to these codes as *keep the faith*, *secular thinking*, and *business as usual* and explore potential patterns and consequences of their collective use. This analysis was supplemented by an additional narrative analysis of interview data that highlighted four narratives representing the varied ways that participants shape and are shaped by the organization. The *congregationalist* and *spiritual authority* narratives are more widely espoused and endorsed in organizational literature while the *rubber stamp* and *separation* narratives reveal a more hesitant or regretful confession of church organizing processes. I synthesize these findings by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of immaterial influences on organizational constitution, particularly in non-profit or third sector contexts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
A Prologue of Positioning.....	1
Overview and Rationale.....	4
Theoretical and Applied Significance.....	8
Chapter Overview and Key Terms	12
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	16
Faith and Other Irrational Influences.....	16
Communicating Faith.....	22
Dynamics in Church Organizing	25
Research Questions	32
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL POSITIONING	34
A Constitutive Ontology.....	34
Application to Present Study	37
Theoretical Distinctions and Debates	39
Research Questions.....	46
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY.....	49
Rationale	49
Research Setting.....	55
Data Collection	59
Methods of Analysis	70
Discursive Analysis	71
Narrative Analysis	74
Analytical Rigor.....	77
Summary.....	80
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCURSIVE DIMENSIONS OF DOWNTOWN BAPTIST MEETINGS.....	82
The Discourse Community	83
Communication Codes of Ethereal and Material Logics	84
Keep the Faith.....	85
Secular Thinking.....	89

Business as Usual.....	96
A Community of Contrasting Codes	100
Discursive Norms.....	101
Consequences of Discursive Norms	106
Summary.....	110
 CHAPTER SIX: NARRATIVES OF DOWNTOWN BAPTIST ORGANIZING.....	111
A Confessional Tale.....	111
Spirit of the Law: The Congregationalist Narrative	114
Shepherding the Family: The Spiritual Authority Narrative	119
Sheep for Show: The Rubber Stamp Narrative.....	125
Silenced Lambs: The Separation Narrative	130
Epilogue	135
 CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION.....	142
Immateriality and CCO Theorizing	142
The Communicative Constitution of Downtown Baptist.....	151
Implications for Third Sector Research and Practice	154
Study Limitations.....	161
Directions for Future Research	162
An Epilogue of Dual Identities	172
 APPENDICES	174
Appendix A: Site Approval Letter.....	174
Appendix B: Subject Consent Form	175
Appendix C: Summary of Meetings Observed.....	178
Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Guide	181
 REFERENCES	183
 VITA.....	210

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Meetings Included in Observational Data	64
Table 4.2: Interview Participant Characteristics	66
Table 5.1: Communication Codes in Downtown Baptist Meetings	100
Table 5.2: Discursive Norms among the Discourse Community and Potential Consequences.....	106
Table 6.1: Comparison of Narratives in Downtown Baptist Organizing.....	140

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Sociologist James Beckford (1985) once said, “One is hard-pressed to think of a characteristic of religious organizations which is nowadays not also shared by nonreligious organizations” (p. 126). From a purely sociological standpoint, perhaps this is true. Religious and faith-based organizations often exhibit formalized structures and services that are comparable to their nonreligious or secular counterparts (e.g., healthcare providers, schools, counseling centers) (see Demerath, Hall, Schmitt, & Williams, 1998). At the same time, though, these organizations expressly market themselves as uniquely faith-based. Thus, the question remains as to what distinguishing role faith plays, if any, in the constitution of an avowedly faith-based or religious organization.

The present study engages this question by examining the complex relationship between faith, communication, and organization in a large Baptist church. In this process, I also interrogate our theoretical understandings of how communication constitutes complex organizations (McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Taylor & Van Every, 2000; see also Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). In this introductory chapter, I outline the purpose of my 5-month case study with “Downtown Baptist”¹ and discuss how this dissertation pertains and contributes to the field of organizational communication. Before I further articulate the purpose, rationale, and significance of this study, though, I first address what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) refer to as the first “choice point” in the qualitative research process, the location of the researcher within the study.

A Prologue of Positioning

On October, 30, 2005, my life changed forever. Only minutes after settling myself into the front pew of my church, I watched as my pastor collapsed beneath the pool of

¹ The organization and participants in this study were provided pseudonyms to secure their anonymity.

water prepared for that morning's baptism. Less than one hour later, my pastor and friend died. In the days that followed, we discovered a faulty water heater located in the baptistery was the culprit in Reverend Kyle Lake's fatal electrocution. Nonetheless, some religious leaders insisted that *God* killed Kyle as retribution for his "heretical" teachings, and they published statements like: "GOD SENDS SHOCKING MESSAGE TO EMERGING CHURCH!" Other pastors denounced these excoriating messages and reassured our community that God would comfort and lead us through this tragic time. All the while, I found myself questioning how *anyone* could claim authority to knowing God's motives and actions.

So to say that "the Spirit moved me" toward this line of research would be both an ironic and quintessential way to preface my positionality. It is quintessential of my standpoint in that I sincerely believe in the power of God's "spirit" to inspire human action. It is for this reason that I am enthralled with the task of organizing in avowedly faith-oriented contexts. Nevertheless, it is an ironic representation of my positionality in that I typically loathe this manner of (trite) speaking. Most of the time, these hackneyed statements are just innocuous, if not socially expected, ways of explaining one's viewpoint or actions. I've heard divinely inspired explanations for everything from occupational choices (e.g., "God called me to be a doctor") to driving routes (e.g., "the Spirit protected me from that accident"), and while the scholar in me begs to ask, "How do you know?", the believer in me is usually resigned to accept this conventional way of speaking.

However, as I witnessed firsthand with Kyle's death, people also use God to justify truly heinous ideologies and actions. It is no secret that countless sins have been

committed under the placard of faith. From the Christian crusades of the 11th through 13th centuries to the Jihadist acts of today's radical Muslims, God has been used throughout history to sanction the destruction of countless lives, resources, and relationships. So while it may be, as Gabriel (2004) says, "inevitable and natural that each person privileges his/her own stories" (p. 76), my stories as a believer do not make me naïve to the ills that may transpire in the name of God.

Thus, as I entered Downtown Baptist I had no preconceived notions that faith would enter into communication toward beneficial ends. As Cheney (1999) rightly notes, "these organizations can go off track and become obsessed with their own power, wealth, and continuance" just as easily as secular ones (p. 16). On the other hand, I also did not enter with the critical assumption that all "God language" would be exploitative and manipulative. My identity as both believer and scholar epitomizes the dirtiness of fieldwork and the delicate relationship between the observer and the observed (Cheney, 2000; Janesick, 2000; Punch, 1986).

And while my experiences as a believer brought on a degree of subjectivity in this study, it is a subjectivity which I argue strengthened rather than compromised my scholarly insight. In addition to informing my scholarly insight, my standpoint as a believer also facilitated access to the organization and its participants. Though I am not Baptist, my Christian faith and employment status at a Baptist university (and subsequent familiarity with Baptist doctrine) helped to foster trust and openness with my participants. Now that I have elucidated my vantage point as a researcher, I now explain and defend the purpose of this study.

Overview and Rationale

For years our field has rallied around a theoretical premise that is recognizable under the recent moniker *communicative constitution of organization*, or *CCO* (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). However, as Putnam, Nicotera, and McPhee (2009) note, we tend to tout this idea “without fully understanding what this means, conceptually or empirically” (p. 5). It is no surprise that we have always considered communication to be a key ingredient in the process and product of organizing, but in more recent years scholars have also begun to reconcile materials and bodies as necessary ingredients in an organization’s constitution. For as K. L. Aschcraft, Kuhn, and Cooren (2009) have rightly noted:

Clearly, organizations exist not only when people invoke them in communication, but also in tangible architecture, artifacts, and technologies; the conduct of tasks by actual bodies and machines; and so forth. However seductive, reducing the constitution of organization to communication [to symbolic activity]...runs the risk of naïve constructivism. After all, organizations are more than what we *say* they are. (p. 24, emphasis in original)

Thus, as CCO theories are continually developed and refined, there has been increased attention toward materials, physical space, temporality, and embodied practice (see Putnam & McPhee, 2009).

Nonetheless, there is one ingredient that scholars have not directly incorporated into our CCO theorizing to date. Beyond symbolic communication and material/corporeal entities, our theorizing has failed to consider the role that *immaterial entities* play, if any, in calling an organization into being. By immaterial entities, I mean powers or forces that are unseen but meaningfully present in member experiences and organizational life.

Beyond emotions which are conceived from within the person who experiences them, immaterial forces are at once intra- and extra-corporeal (even extra-terrestrial in some sense). These forces may be (a) ineffably abstract, as in the notion of a sixth sense or intuition, or (b) more distinctly associated with an ethereal spirit or deity (e.g., angels, Trinitarian Holy Spirit, the ghost of a loved one). While not directly tied to CCO thought, scholars in our field have attended to immateriality in various studies of organizational spirituality (e.g., Considine, 2007; Hoffman, 2007; McGuire, 2010; Rodriguez, 2001; Sass, 2000) and imaginative aesthetics (e.g., Clair, 2003; Harter, 2009; Harter, Leeman, Norander, Young, & Rawlins, 2008; Harter, Norander, & Quinlan, 2007; Hogler, Gross, Hartman, Cunliffe, & 2008; Warren, 2008) to name a few.

Nonetheless, these studies have not occupied a central place in our theorizing of the communicative constitution of organizations. Thus, the focus of this dissertation is to examine the communicative dimensions and consequences of immateriality as it pertains to the constitution of complex organizations. Particularly, I examine a form of immateriality I refer to as *faith-oriented influences*, a phenomenon that aligns with the aforementioned category of immaterial forces more specifically tied to supernatural spirits and deities (e.g., angels, Trinitarian Holy Spirit, God). Like all immaterial influences, the notion of a faith-oriented force is a highly subjective phenomenon that resists traditional empirical definition and inquiry (Schultze, 2005). It aligns more with narrative reasoning (Browning, 1992; Fisher, 1987; Ricoeur, 1984) and organizational irrationality (see Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Trethewey & K. L. Ashcraft, 2004), and it defies instrumental or technical rationality.

For some people, faith-oriented forces even connote that the supernatural referent is an agent in the communication process. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life provides evidence of this in their *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Pew Research Center, 2008). Notable excerpts from their findings include that: (a) 51% of adults in the United States express certainty in their belief of God's existence and view God as a person with whom they can have a relationship (p. 28); (b) 68% of adults in the United States believe that angels and demons are present on earth (p. 34); and (c) 31% of adults in the United States say they receive definite answers to specific prayer requests at least once a month (p. 53). Thus, it appears that many people view these entities (e.g., God, angels, spirits) as interactive and present in their life experiences.

Even so, faith-oriented influences may initially appear to be tangential to organizational communication theory and research. Traditionally, faith-oriented elements have been barred from many (secular) organizations and industries (see Graber & Johnson, 2001). However, some studies suggest that this private element is being increasingly implanted into varied organizational settings and is producing both positive and negative outcomes for members (e.g., Goodier & Eisenberg, 2006; McGuire, 2010; Nadesan, 1999). In addition to corporate and secular-oriented organizational contexts, faith-oriented influences are presumably also detectable in churches and other types of faith-based/religious organizations. Though we often exclude these types of organizations from our field of study, they occupy a notable place in society. The U.S. Department of Labor (2009) estimates that approximately 187,000 people are currently employed in religious organizations in the United States. Further, the U. S. Census Bureau's Statistical Abstract data (compiled by the National Council of Churches, USA, 2009) reflects that

nearly 162 million people in the United States and Canada are members of religious bodies, and it is estimated that approximately 25% to 40% percent of people in the United States attend religious services weekly (Hadaway & Marler, 2005).

In sum, it appears that faith-oriented influences are gaining acknowledgement in traditional organizations while they already exercise some manner of authority in explicitly faith-centered organizations (albeit, it is unclear to what extent, function, and consequences these types of forces may be present). Though organizational communication scholars have not taken much notice of this idea, many suggest that “the possibility that God is a speech agent refuses to die in human culture” (Schultze, 2005, p. 4). As such, it is time to begin examining the role that faith-oriented influences (among other immaterial entities) play in the communicative constitution of organizations. By disrupting the “secular hegemony” that pervades organizational communication research, we may potentially “develop more encompassing understandings of theories of communication” (Rodriguez, 2001, p. ix; see also, Buzzanell & Harter, 2006; Harter & Buzzanell, 2007).

Toward this end, I conducted an extended case study of a large Baptist church over a 5-month period. My data collection at Downtown Baptist (DB) consisted of formal meetings observations, semi-structured interviews with multiple types of members involved in the church organizing process, and examination of multiple organizational documents that presumably inform the church’s formal structure and decision-making processes (e.g., the church constitution and bylaws). In total, I observed 26 formal meetings (52 total hours of observation, including 3.5 hours of audio-taped interaction), conducted 40 interviews with pastors, support staff, and lay leaders (e.g., deacons,

committee chairs/members), and examined seven documents generated by Downtown Baptist and the Southern Baptist Convention of Texas. My data collection and analytical process was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1a: What D/discourses are present in Downtown Baptist (DB) organizing?

RQ1b: How do these D/discourses intermingle in Downtown Baptist organizing?

RQ2a: How do Downtown Baptist members perceivably interpret these discourses?

RQ2b: How do these interpretations affect member communication?

RQ3a: In what ways does the present study enhance and/or challenge current theorizing on the communicative constitution of organizations?

RQ3b: What role does communication play in constituting Downtown Baptist?

The first set of research questions is descriptive in nature and aims to identify the qualitative dimensions of Downtown Baptist organizational discourse. The second set of research questions offers insight into how DB members interpret this discourse and to what ends, and the final set of research questions examines the notion of a communicative ontology of organizational constitution. These descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative questions are further addressed in Chapters Two (see p. 32) and Three (see pp. 46-47) of this dissertation. This study makes several theoretical and practical contributions which are discussed in turn.

Theoretical and Applied Significance

The present study makes theoretically significant contributions to three areas of organizational communication research. First, this study attempts to enhance CCO theorizing in general by testing its dimensions in empirical data. This all important step

of “getting on” with data collection and analysis from a CCO perspective has been a notable weak spot in the largely ontological arguments that comprise CCO work to date (Bisel, 2009). Further, this study seeks to elaborate on CCO thought by examining the role of *immateriality* in organizational constitution. Considering that “communicating with God, however baffling and however co-opted by various political and economic interests, has long been and continues to be a critically important practice among human beings”, it has a rightful place in communication theory (Schultze, 2005, p. 4).

Second, the study of church organizing furthers our understanding of how members deal with irrational (e.g., immaterial influences) and rational (e.g., formalized policies and procedures) influences in the process of organizing. Beyond faith-oriented influences, many church organizations (including Downtown Baptist) are also incorporating more rational influences such as formal structures for communication and decision-making. As Hall (2007) notes, many larger churches have “developed administrative structures that are often similar to those of business entities, with the pastor operating as CEO and his or her administrative team operating as middle management”; as such, this “necessitat[es] thoughtful analysis of the organization that is a church” (p. 199). It is important to note that organizational irrationality, in this context is defined as “alternative logics around which to organize” (Harter et al., 2008, p. 425); it is not meant to suggest unreasonable, rash, or overly emotional processes of decision-making and action (Trethewey & K. L. Ashcraft, 2004). Likewise, the term rationality is not meant to connote reasonableness, lucidity, sensibility, or correctness. Rather, I use the term irrational or non-rational logics to delineate a contrast to technical rationalities concerned with empirical standards and tangible verifiability. Scholars (see Mumby &

Putnam, 1992; Tracy, 2004; Trethewey & K. L. Ashcraft, 2004) have increasingly championed the notion that these two are not necessarily dichotomous, but further empirical work is required to more fully understand this dynamic. Thus, the present study of church organizing provides further insight into the nature and implications of this relationship.

Third, this study furthers our understanding of the unique communicative dynamics in organizations within the civil society or third sector (see Lewis, 2005). For example, like non-profits, church organizations must balance multiple membership contracts (e.g., full-time pastors, part-time staff, lay leader volunteers) in a way that traditional for-profit organizations do not. As such, these contexts may expand our theoretical understanding of the superior-subordinate relationship (i.e., McPhee and Zaugg's flow of *membership negotiation*). Likewise, because mission is so central to church organizations and yet is often very abstract, it is an equally rich context to enhance our understanding of mission assessment and accountability in third sector organizations.

In sum, the church is part of a civil society sector that serves as “a vastly rich context for testing and building management communication theory and bases for best practices in organizations” (Lewis, 2005, p. 242). At present, though, the extent to which church organizing is similar to and distinct from other organizational contexts remains uncertain. Thus, examination of this context will also test McPhee and Zaugg's (2000/2009) claim that their CCO framework “gives us a template by which to detect, diagnose, and assess novel organizational phenomena” (p. 32). In this process, I also question how churches may be unique in their own right. Further, the questions that guide

this study address the presently scattered attention to *immateriality* and, through the study of faith-oriented discourse, explore its place in a communicative ontology of organization.

In addition to these scholarly contributions, this study offers several practical implications for church organizing. Though 56% of Americans claim that religion is very important in their lives and 82% claim that it is at least somewhat important (Pew Research Center, 2008), church involvement in the United States continues to decline (Ammerman, 2005; Barna, 1998). Pastors and religious scholars have advanced numerous theologically-focused solutions for church leadership and governance; however, church consultant and writer George Barna (1998) contends, “the *systems, structures, institutions, and relational networks* developed for the furtherance of the Church are archaic, inefficient, and ineffective – and perhaps, even unbiblical. Our problem, then, is not theological but practical in nature” (p. 7, emphasis added).

Organizational communication scholars are uniquely positioned to help develop ways that these *systems, structures, institutions, and relational networks* may be reinvigorated (Barge, 2001; Barge & Craig, 2009). This study in particular imparts insight into (a) the often tenuous expectations of church lay leaders and support staff, (b) the delicate balance between congregationalist church governance (i.e., democracy) and pastoral authority, and (c) the relationship between the nuanced patterns of speaking (i.e., modes of thought) that inform church decision-making. In demonstrating the consequentiality of communication to a church’s mission, goals, and identity, we may teach pastors and church leaders how to better communicate both internally with their congregations and externally with their community.

Chapter Overview and Key Terms

This chapter introduced the present study and discussed how it may inform organizational communication theory, research, and practice. In Chapter Two, I review the interdisciplinary literature on faith and compare it to the communication literature's treatment of related non-rational organizational processes. Additionally, I discuss our present understandings of church organizing and pose several descriptive and interpretive research questions to enhance our communicative understandings of these processes. Chapter Three synthesizes the CCO theorizing to date, further articulates its relevance to the present study, and poses an additional set of research questions to guide this study. Chapter Four describes the research setting, methods of data collection, analytical procedures, and steps taken throughout the process to strengthen the case study findings. Chapters Five and Six disclose the results of the case study analysis and address the research questions posed in Chapter Three. The final chapter of the dissertation will answer the research questions posed in Chapter Four as I discuss the theoretical import of the study, implications for research and practice of church organizing, and potential avenues for future research. Before continuing on to the literature review, I first take a moment to clarify my use of several terms used throughout this dissertation.

Term Distinctions

Because these terms are often equivocally defined or conflated with other concepts in the scholarly literature, it is necessary to explain my distinct use of the terms *church organizing/organization*, *communication*, and *discourse*. Because advocates and critics of CCO theory often talk past each other and create conceptual confusion by adopting different meanings of the term "organization" (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; see

also Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004), I first distinguish my use of this term. I use the term *organization* to connote the dynamic but stable entity that is an organization; this definition aligns with Fairhurst and Putnam's (2004) conceptualization of an organization as a communicative *entity in process*. I contrast this term with the similar but distinct term *organizing* in that I view the latter as the "process" part of the entity in process. This term connotes more of a Weickian (1969/1979) idea of organization as "verb", the actual accomplishment of communicatively coordinated action at a given moment in time. Thus, my use of the term *church organization* is distinct from the typical interdisciplinary definition of church organizations as fixed set of characteristics and features (e.g., McMullen, 1994; Monahan, 1999).

This brings me to my deliberate adoption of the term *church organization* over *faith-based, spiritual, or religious organization*. The term *church* specifically delineates any place or house reserved for deity worship (e.g., synagogue, mosque, temple), but it does not necessarily include the expressed goals and services of other so-called faith-based or religious organizations. My use of this term helps to avoid conflation with other terms featured in the literature such as *spiritual organization* (Goodier & Eisenberg, 2006), *religious organization* (Hoffman, 2007), and *faith-based organization* (Feldner, 2006) which are used by scholars to represent a number of organizations that espouse spiritual or religious values but do not necessarily orient them toward the purpose of creating and sustaining a house of worship (e.g., religiously affiliated social service agencies and educational institutions). This distinction is necessary as many scholars and practitioners view churches as uniquely distinct from these other types of religious/faith-based organizations (for further discussion see Jeavons, 1998). However, as church and

faith-based organizations also share common elements (e.g., similar values), several studies of faith-based organizations are included in the subsequent literature review (Chapter Two). In sum, my use of the term *church organization* connotes the communicative process of creating and sustaining a house of worship.

This communicative definition is made clearer by articulating a precise view of communication and organization. K. L. Ashcraft, Kuhn, and Cooren (2009) offer an exacting definition of communication as “the ongoing, dynamic, interactive process of manipulating symbols toward the creation, maintenance, destruction, and/or transformation of meanings, which are axial—not peripheral—to organizational existence and organizing phenomena” (p. 23)². In other words, communication is seen as the means whereby organizations are constituted. This is different from the narrower concept of discourse. The term *discourse* refers to specific message exchanges and *Discourse* delineates broader “persisting modes of thought” (Barge & Little, 2008, p. 508). This use of “little d” and “big D” discourse is consistent with previous scholars’ use (e.g., Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004), and it facilitates more precise discussions of the communicative and organizational context.

In short, communication is the ultimate process of meaning-making that is chiefly accomplished through discursive interaction (Jian, Schmisser, & Fairhurst, 2008). When applied to this study, then, I often use the term *faith-centered influences* to connote communication centered on faith. This communication may be informed by both faith-centered discourses (i.e., specific message exchanges about faith) and faith-centered Discourses (i.e., broader ideologies about faith). Now that these foundational definitions

² The authors amend this definition later in the same work (see p. 34). However, I take issue with their amended definition for reasons that are discussed in Chapter 7 of this dissertation.

have been established, I can now more clearly synthesize the pertinent communication and interdisciplinary research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I attempt to situate the present study within the field of organizational communication by incorporating scholarship from both communication and the sociology of religion. First, I incorporate literature from the latter discipline to shed further insight into the concept of faith, and then I compare this concept to other irrational influences examined in the communication literature. This section is followed by a discussion of the relationship between communication and faith. Next, I incorporate literature from both communication and other fields to establish a knowledge base of the organizational communication dynamics in church settings. Based on this knowledge, I pose several research questions to guide this study.

Faith and Other Irrational Influences

Sociology scholars emphasize the belief and encounter with supernatural connection as a defining element of faith. This connection is summarized by Schoenherr (1987) as a “confront[ation] with an overwhelming and mysterious power which transcends the...person in which the power is manifested” (p. 53). In other words, faith is conceptualized as something that is bigger than the individual that often compels him or her to succumb to that transcendent power.

This faith encounter and response has been examined by both communication and sociology scholars in the notion of “calling.” Ingram’s (1981) sociological study of pastoral calling in Southern Baptist churches draws attention to two connotations attached to calling: (a) the idea that the individual has been set apart for a specific purpose, and the related suggestion that (b) the individual possesses some special skills or gifts to accomplish this specific objective. Scott (2007) also examined the idea of calling

in her interview study with religious students who recently went through career counseling. Her study supported Ingram's (1981) idea that faith prompts a dutiful response or "service", and she also drew attention to the supernatural connection that is prompted by a calling. She found that many students felt a connection to God or "inner conviction" that He would intimately guide them through their vocational choices. In a slightly different vein, Feldner (2006) draws attention to the idea that our understandings of calling may be shaped by religious doctrine. In her study of university mission building, she notes the Catholic belief that one may discern their calling by engaging in spiritual exercises (i.e., a series of reflections asking for God's response).

Thus, the literature to date intimates that faith affords a connection with the divine that, in turn, affords them with the confidence and authority to take certain actions. This conceptualization suggests that faith has the capacity to drive member influence and organizational actions, an implication that will be discussed in a subsequent section of this review. At present, I address the relationship between faith and other non-rational phenomena that have been discussed in the prevailing organizational communication literature.

Connection to Irrational Communication Phenomena

In discussing faith-oriented influences in organizing, the body of literature on organizational spirituality may most readily come to mind. Faith as it is conceptualized here shares some overlap with our discipline's treatment of spirituality, but it is important to note the key differences, as well. I use McGuire's (2010) prototypical definition of spirituality to demonstrate this overlap and distinction. She states, "two components constitute spirituality: (a) a connection with a greater whole (variously defined) and (b)

the tie to some sort of values/ethics/morals with regard to one's obligations and relationships with others (however broadly or narrowly defined)" (p. 79). The former component of McGuire's definition corresponds to faith, and it is echoed in other works in this body of literature such as Sass's (2000) notion of "connectedness" to a higher power as an integral component in workplace spirituality.

However, the latter moral/ethical component that is often tied to organizational spirituality is not intrinsic to the idea of faith as it is conceptualized in this study. Likewise, the concept of faith is not synonymous with communication and management scholars' characterizations of spirituality as a concern for work-life balance, democratic and participatory work processes, and meaningful work (for a collection of works in this vein see Buzzanell & Harter, 2006 and Rodriguez, 2001). While faith-centered discourses may effectually speak to these issues, they are not fundamental to the construct. In sum, faith-oriented influences share organizational spirituality's attunement to ethereal connection, but they do not connote spirituality's concern with workplace ethics, fairness, and collaboration.

In addition to spirituality, faith-oriented communication also shares similarities with the organizational constructs of emotionality (Mumby & Putnam, 1992), narrative rationality (Fisher 1987; see also Browning, 1992), and aesthetic sensibilities (Harter et al., 2008). Like spirituality, though, each construct bears unique aspects, and, thus, these areas of overlap and divergence are noted accordingly. Mumby and Putnam (1992) introduced the construct of bounded emotionality as an alternative mode of organizing that exists, not in opposition, but in "creative tension" with bounded rationality (Simon, 1976). Through a post-structuralist feminist lens, the authors astutely point out that,

“Simon (1989) depicted holistic forms of reasoning such as intuition and judgment as *nonrational* and decisions based on emotions as *irrational*” (p. 470, italics in original). In sum, they contend that institutional discourses have historically privileged the cognitive metaphor, and they alternatively draw attention to the marginalized body (i.e., emotion) as a common and even appropriate base for reasoning. Like emotionality, the construct of faith presents an alternative to the cognitive metaphor, but unlike emotionality, faith-centered reasoning in its purest form is not housed in the body. Rather, it draws from mind, body, and spirit to inform decision-making and action. This spiritual element of faith draws from an extra-corporeal or, in some senses, extra-terrestrial base of influence for knowledge and insight that goes beyond the scope of emotionality.

Similar to emotionality, Fisher’s (1987) construct of narrative rationality proposes “not only a different conception of reason...but also a much broader conception of rationality” (p. 17). He presents narrative rationality as a third form of reasoning to be added to technical logics (i.e., positivism) and rhetorical arguments (e.g., syllogism) (p. 17). In the process of organizing, this form of reasoning champions less positivistic values of coherence (i.e., believability, probability) and verisimilitude (i.e., the appearance of truth value). Browning (1992) provides additional description of this form of organizing, describing it as one of two forms of organizational communication. In contrast to technical/rational “lists,” Browning argues that “stories” involve personal experience, reject empirical knowledge, and change over time.

This form of narrative rationality is similar to faith in that it relies on personal interpretation rather than tangible evidence for decision-making and action. Stories as a form of organizational communication are also similar to faith in that they often integrate

mythical, otherworldly elements into their telling. However, narrative modes of reasoning are not fundamentally and necessarily based in these elements as faith-centered modes of thought are. In other words, faith may be a dimension of narrative influences in organizing, but it is not a necessary condition.

Finally, the recent attention to aesthetic sensibilities in organizing (e.g., Harter et al., 2008; Warren, 2008) shares some connections with the present study's conceptualization of faith. A notable example is Harter and colleagues' (2008) study of a collaborative arts studio wherein the authors define aesthetic sensibilities as an imaginative, ephemeral, and collaborative mode of reasoning that involves the self and others in the accomplishment of organizational goals. Like emotionality, they present it as an alternative form of organizing that "can, and does, intermingle with instrumental logics...[as] a knowledge-producing resource for organizing" (p. 447). Thus, the notion of aesthetic sensibilities is similar to faith in that they both require the acceptance of imagination in organizational processes. Likewise, faith also operates, in part, in the ineffable space between human senses and materiality that characterizes aesthetic reasoning (see Warren, 2008). However, aesthetics is much more based in corporeal experience and judgment than faith which invokes a supernatural base for thought and action.

In sum, faith is similar to emotional, narrative, and aesthetic modes of thought in that it serves as an alternative to traditional organizational discourses which privilege technical logic, formalization, and empirical standards (Trethewey & K. L. Ashcraft, 2004). They all shape our ideologies and communicative sensibilities in ways that are distinctly different from list-like discourses that, as Browning (1992) says, "take the

arbitrariness and mystery out of performance and make universal efficiency theoretically possible” (p. 284). However, there is a unique aspect to faith that distinguishes it from the aforementioned modes of thought. Both communication and sociology scholars have pointed to this uniqueness which is addressed in turn.

The Distinctiveness of Faith

The distinguishing characteristic of faith centers on the idea of agency. Specifically, faith-centered discourses perceivably imbue agency to an unseen yet powerful entity that has the human-like capacity to shape social processes and outcomes in the *here and now* (Schultze, 2005). Though the memory of an iconic figure from an organization’s past may enter into members’ narrative reasoning (e.g., what would Walt Disney think), such references are temporally confined to the past and do not imbue the figure (e.g., Disney) with any enduring agency. In contrast, faith-centered modes of thought invoke a *living* and, at times, human-like being (e.g., God, Holy Spirit) that is *presently* engaged in members’ lives and organizational matters. Previous communication and sociological studies provide evidence of this idea. For example, Scott’s (2007) study of students struggling with their vocational calling demonstrates this as participants explained that God “reveals,” “tells,” “nudges,” and “leads” them toward their intended career paths. Likewise, Poloma’s (1997) ethnographic study of a church movement cited numerous examples wherein members talked about the Holy Spirit “moving” or “leading” them toward decisions and actions. In a similar vein, Chatham’s (2006) analysis of church women’s stories found that God was even referenced in the symbolic interactionist manner of a significant other.

Essentially, it appears as though faith-centered discourses are based in what scholars refer to as a supernatural referent (e.g., Chaves, 1993; Grant, O’Neil, and Stephens, 2003). Weber (1978) defined this brand of influence as prophetic charisma, and he contended that this ultimately leads to hierocratic coercion (i.e., the influence of others through claims to divine authority). Drawing upon Weber’s work, Chaves (1993) defined this as the religious authority structure:

A social structure that attempts to enforce its order and reach its end by controlling the access of individuals to some desired goods [e.g., healing, eternal life, wealth], where the legitimation of that control includes some supernatural component, however weak. (p. 149)

Likewise, Schoenherr (1987) emphasizes that this form of influence, “generates a unique form of power in that it transcends finite bounds...it is transcendently absolute” (p. 55). Considering that this form of influence is intimate, ethereal, and often experienced individually, though, its power lies in the communication among members.

Communicating Faith

Faith-centered modes of thought combine divine and human agency in a precarious relationship that Schultze (2005) refers to as the “God problem” in communication studies. To accept faith as a force for organizing is to take what Schultze refers to as the *theism* strategy which embraces the notion of a “personal, human-involved God who ‘speaks’” (p. 14). This possibility of transcendent speech between humans and God is something that is not accounted for in traditional organizational Discourses that revere instrumentally rational, public, and cognitively-based ways of knowing (Trethewey & K. L. Ashcraft, 2004). Thus, there is limited scholarly insight into

the qualitative dimensions of faith-centered discourses and their consequences for organizational communication processes. Rather, most studies to date have merely cited the presence of individual faith expressions (e.g., Scott, 2007) and faith-oriented activities such as group prayer (e.g., Driskill & Camp, 2006). The small body of literature that is more descriptive in scope is discussed in turn.

Aside from communication studies that merely cite the practice of faith expressions, Branham (1980) and Conrad (1988) offer more descriptive insight into how faith is communicated in social interaction. Branham (1980) does not focus on faith directly, but his description of four potential responses to ineffable experiences offer insight into how one might communicate about a supernatural connection. The first response, *qualified expression*, involves pairing a line of reasoning with qualified statements such as “I just can’t tell you” or “words are inadequate to convey” (p. 15). In the context of faith expressions in church organizations this might involve someone advocating a particular decision or program and framing it as “a God-thing,” “Spirit led,” or something that the speaker just had “a peace about.” This response is most similar to previous scholars’ recognition of faith expressions (e.g., Poloma, 1997; Scott, 2007).

Branham’s second response of *silence* is seemingly most applicable in his discussion of *partial silence*. This is described as an individual speaking only to instruct a group in an effort to engage in meditative thought for discernment. As applied to faith, this would be demonstrated with a speaker encouraging others to engage in silent prayer. The third response, *poetic expression*, is accomplished by two means that Branham refers to as *linguistic purification* and *literary indirection*. Linguistic purification involves direct acknowledgment of the power of the ineffability, and in reference to faith this may

be accomplished by referencing the awe inspiring or immaculate nature of God's influence. Literary indirection involves indirect expression through the use of myth and metaphor which, in faith expressions, is exemplified through the use of parables. Branham's final response to ineffability is *antiexpression* which is characterized by the use of irony and paradox. In the context of faith, this would be an appeal to natural logics as evidence of a supernatural connection; for example, someone might attempt to prove that God exists by using empirical evidence. Together, Branham contends that these responses, while failing to uphold traditional expectations of communicative competence, may be potentially successful in communicating the ineffable experience (e.g., a supernatural connection).

Conrad (1988) offers one of the few empirical studies of how church members attempt to communicate faith. Particularly, Conrad found that members appeal to faith in decision-making rationales through the use of "personal testimonies." These testimonies, Conrad contends, usually follow a member's citation of Biblical evidence for a given position and include statements about how God has guided his or her interpretation of the aforementioned scriptures and/or church experiences. Conrad also notes that the rhetorical power of personal testimonies varies, in part, due to the role of the member using it. This potentially political dimension of personal testimonies is further discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter (see Roles and Relationships).

In reference to the consequences of faith-centered communication, the sociology of religion literature acknowledges that "God talk" may play a central role in persuading and influencing others toward a desired end (Grant et al., 2003; see also, Chaves, 1993). However, this body of literature does not explain how this influence is collaboratively

achieved in member interaction. Rather, they simply cite prayer as a communal expression of faith in organizational settings. For example, Vanderwoerd (2004) acknowledged in his study of two-faith based service agencies that it appears “prayer is an important mechanism for organizational decision making” (p. 250). In the same way, communication scholars have also cited prayer as a faith-centered activity in organizational meetings (e.g., Driskill & Camp, 2006), but they fail to elaborate on how prayer is carried out and to what organizational ends. Thus, while there is scholarly evidence that faith is expressed through discursive actions such as qualified expression (Scott, 2007), personal testimonies (Conrad, 1988), and communal prayer (Driskill & Camp, 2006), there is little description of the qualitative dimensions of the discourses and analysis of related organizational communication outcomes. The next section summarizes our present understandings of the relationship between faith and the overarching process of church organizing.

Dynamics of Church Organizing

Organizational communication scholars have used churches as a site for inquiry into various phenomena (e.g., Dixon, 2004; McPhee & Corman, 1995), but there has been limited scholarly attention in our field toward the potentially unique communicative dimensions of church organizing. The interdisciplinary literature draws our attention to two issues that are addressed respectively: (a) the centrality of institutional structures in church governance and (b) the complexity of member roles and relationships in church organizing. However, there are weaknesses in this and the communication literatures which constrain our understandings of the communication dynamics in churches and the role that faith plays, if any, in church organizing. Before discussing each issue, I first

identify the centrality of meetings in church organizing and the role that meetings play in negotiating these institutional influences, member roles, and relational dynamics.

Meetings and Church Organizing

Churches are typically strong adherents to what Leeman (2006) refers to as the “meeting paradigm.” By this, the author means that staff and lay leaders are almost continually engaged in a plethora of meetings about church programming and administration. The likely origin of this meeting paradigm in churches traces back to the Protestant Reformation when lay people began to be more involved in church decisions and actions (see K. Tracy & Dimock, 2004). It is for this reason that meetings are so prevalent in many churches today. Because lay leaders are physically removed from the church site yet often play a central role in church organizing, meetings serve as the chief platform for staff and lay leader communication. In other words, the democratic structure that presumably governs many church bodies necessitates meetings as one of the integral tools for constructing an organization (K. Tracy, 2007).

Further, meetings are an integral part of the two issues that will be discussed in the remainder of this literature review: (a) the negotiation of power and authority, and (b) the construction of member roles and relationships in an espoused democratic environment. K. Tracy and Dimock’s (2004) discussion of meetings points to both of these issues. In their review of the important role that meetings play in organizational communication research, they discuss meetings as “sites in which people display their own power and resist demands of others. The having of meetings is linked to some of society’s most valued ideals – giving voice, fairness, democracy” (p. 128). The meeting paradigm in churches is further evident in that most of the studies comprising this section

of the literature review centered on meeting interactions. Now that I have highlighted the important role that meetings play in churches, I discuss the available literature on the nature, role, and consequences of institutional governance in church organizing.

Power and Polity: Institutional Influence in Churches

One way in which God's dictates are seen as influencing organizing is through formal church governance. Religious scholars and practitioners refer to this formal governance as polity, defined by McMullen (1994) as the "rules of ecclesiastical authority that dictate the rituals by which church government operates" (p. 712). There are three common forms of polity described in the interdisciplinary literature: (a) Congregational polity which recognizes the local church as the single source of authority (e.g., Baptists), (b) Episcopal polity which recognizes a regional bishop as the chief source of authority over local churches (e.g., Catholics), and (c) Presbyterian polity which recognizes a body of elders, in cooperation with the elders of other area churches, as the central authority in a local church (e.g., Presbyterians) (see Takayama & Sachs, 1976). Congregational polity is the form of governance adopted by the church in this case study.

Thus, polity in general effectually formalizes the notion of faith in a church, at least as it is applied to organizational decision-making. Sociological works recognize this formalization of faith in several ways. For example, Schoenherr (1987) argues that religious organizations propel themselves toward codified, empirical standards in an effort to define or legitimize the faith experience. Weber's (1968/1978) notion of the routinization of charisma in religious organizations also supports this view. In an empirical demonstration of this idea, Poloma's (1997) case study of the Toronto Airport

Christian Fellowship found that institutional forces, rules, and regulations inevitably threatened faith-centered discourses associated with the power of the Holy Spirit. She acknowledges this formalization of faith with her discussion of the *dilemma of administrative order*, the “ever-present danger of overelaborating institutional structures in ways that jeopardize [spiritual] charisma” (p. 269). Likewise, communication scholars such as B. C. Taylor (1999) have provided further evidence of this move toward formalization. In his study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Taylor found evidence that the church has “standardized all aspects of Church doctrine, bureaucracy, and worship programs” (pp. 68-69).

Chaves (1993) contends that this demonstrates the second structure in religious organizations, the *agency structure*. In addition to the aforementioned religious authority structure that emphasizes God’s dynamic influence on organizing, Chaves contends that the agency structure is concerned with clear division of responsibilities and codified procedures for organizational action. He contends that the agency and religious authority structures that form organizations “perform different kinds of tasks, respond to different parts of the environment, cope with different kinds of uncertainty, and contain separate lines of authority” (pp. 147-148).

Further, Robbins (1985) argues that this mix of faith-centered authority and formalized, institutional authority in churches exists in tension rather than synthesis. He summarizes this tension as an “uneasy mixture of charismatic and rational-legal elements” wherein “the sanctity of individual conscience increasingly appears as an implausible legitimating foundation for elaborated organizational patterns suffused with instrumental rationality” (p. 238). In the same vein, Schoenherr (1987) characterizes this

relationship as a “dialectic of countervailing forces” (p. 57). Communication scholars have also drawn attention to the presumed uneasy relationship between faith-centered modes of thought and instrumental rationality. For example, Kirby et al. (2006) point out in their autoethnographic study of teaching at a Jesuit university that members are faced with the tedious task of “walking the line” between these organizing forces.

Nevertheless, both the communication and sociology literatures scarcely address how these structures are created in communication, and they also fail to empirically examine how these D/discourses intermingle in the process of organizing. Communication scholars are also responsible for making hasty generalizations about church structure. For example, Brenton (1993) makes the broad statement that “the church is inherently hierarchical and characterized by asymmetrical power influence” (p. 23). Likewise, Coopman and Meidlinger (2000) assume that the Catholic Church is inherently bureaucratic, though other scholars have cited that members do not necessarily view or experience the Church as a bureaucracy (e.g., Cheney, 1991). Recent studies of house churches and other nontraditional religious organizations also contradict this assumption (e.g., Hammonds & Montgomerie, 2007).

And while sociological studies emphasize the nuances among polity in church organizing, this literature is also lacking. Specifically, these studies largely fail to account descriptively for how polity influences the day-to-day process of organizing (e.g., McMullen, 1994), and they largely presuppose that polity informs organizing in an unquestioned sense. For example, Takayama and Sachs (1976) simply assume that polities “significantly influence the way in which informal and bureaucratic power structures and the environment affect internal control and denomination” in church

organizations (p. 269). In sum, this literature erroneously assumes that members actually uphold and follow polity in their daily coordination of actions. Organizational communication scholars have provided some evidence to challenge this assumption. Notably, Hoffman's (2002) ethnographic study of Benedictine women revealed that the women alternatively organized their church existence in ways that countered the institutional environment in which they were embedded. This emphasis on the local accomplishment of organizing leads into the subsequent discussion of the nature and expectations of member roles and relationships in church contexts.

Roles and Relationships

Studies in the sociology of religion offer insight into the various member types and roles that influence organizational processes. Beyond the authority that is presumably afforded to pastors and other clergy, Monahan (1999) highlights the role that lay members play in influencing organizational decisions and action. Particularly, she cites that administrative work (e.g., activities surrounding human resources and Personnel issues) is often shared by both clergy and lay leaders. And while she does not provide any qualitative evidence describing the communicative accomplishment or consequences of this shared authority, she does postulate that clergy tenure affords a greater degree of control over these organizational matters.

Ingram's (1981) study of Southern Baptist pastors contends that this shared relationship may foster conflict between these groups, and he identifies three ways that pastors potentially respond to this tension. *Role segregation* is the first response, and it entails the pastor separating his or her clergy activities (e.g., preaching) from administrative work. This approach affords the pastor with the opportunity to say what he

or she desires from the pulpit (e.g., the value of giving all your possessions to the poor) while acting in different ways regarding administrative decisions (e.g., advocating for increased staff salaries). The second response, *abdication*, includes quitting in response to the conflict or avoiding the conflict altogether. Finally, Ingram proposes the pastoral strategy of *manipulation*, an indirect approach to influencing church decisions by (a) finding sympathetic lay members to serve on committees, (b) holding secret meetings, (c) alienating problematic members, (d) appealing to harmony, and (e) stalling, among other strategic actions. Alternatively, though, the interdisciplinary literature does not provide much insight into how lay members negotiate their roles through communication nor does it explicate the consequences of the role negotiations.

The communication literature offers more qualitative, descriptive insight into these relationships and their consequences. For example, Brenton's (1993) critical linguistic study of elder and lay leader conflict examined the messages constructed by each group and their related implications for church authority and governance. Particularly, he analyzed the "confession" of a lay leader and the "response" of elders in Sunday morning and evening services and discovered that both groups claimed themselves as intermediaries for God's voice about appropriate organizational action. Through verbal contradiction, paradox, and irony, Brenton concluded that elders attempted to regain their authority which had been undermined by the lay leaders.

In addition to the roles of pastor and lay leader, Coopman and Meidlinger's (2000) study of staff members in a Catholic parish draws attention to a third type of role, the non-clergy staff member. The authors concluded that these members often reinforced organizational hierarchy and pastoral authority in their stories. Beyond this study,

however, there is little, if any, attention to the role and experiences of non-pastoral staff members in churches.

Other studies downplay divisiveness and difference among clergy, staff, and lay leaders by examining the alternative development of housechurches described by Hammonds and Montgomerie (2007) as “a group of Christian people that...seek out an informal, flexible, and relation-centered community for worship” (pp. 3-4; see also Leeman, 2006). Houseschurches tout the notion that everyone shares the spiritual authority to receive God’s word, and as such, formal roles and instrumental organizational outcome goals are rejected and “personal and shared experiences, their relationships, and the society they help build are put in the center” (Leeman, 2006, p. 9).

Though the housechurch model is an uncharacteristic example, studies of more traditional Protestant churches also point to the focus on relationship-building and unity among various church leaders. For example, Driskill and Camp’s (2006) study of a collaboration of 100 churches found that pastors engaged in activities such as prayer during meetings that were, on the one hand about faith, but on the other hand, “clearly about building a bond of support” (p. 465). However, scholars who have studied these more relationship-centered priorities and activities in churches also note that these bonds come at the expense of efficiency in organizational decision-making and action (Hammonds & Montgomerie, 2007; Leeman, 2006). The following section synthesizes this body of literature and poses several questions for further insight.

Research Questions

Given that there are varying authority structures, goals, and values in church organizing, it follows that there would also be different discourses. However, there is

limited qualitative understanding of what discourses govern member interaction in church organizing (see Conrad, 1988 for an exception). Rather, most of the literature to date suggests that both faith-oriented and rational-legal forces compete with one another in this organizational context without providing any qualitative evidence of these forces and their interactions (Robbins, 1985, p. 238; see also Chaves, 1993; Schoenherr, 1987).

Thus, I pose the following research questions:

RQ1a: What D/discourses are present in Downtown Baptist (DB) organizing?

RQ1b: How do these D/discourses intermingle in Downtown Baptist organizing?

This first set of questions is descriptive in nature and aims to identify the qualitative dimensions of these discourses.

In addition to these questions, I am also concerned with how members interpret these D/discourses and to what ends. The sociological and communication literature provides evidence that formal roles are both distinct and indiscernible. Likewise, they demonstrate that relationships among church leaders may be tension-filled and discordant as well as supportive and harmonious. As such, it is unclear how member roles and relationships work with faith-centered and other discourses in church communication and to what ends. Considering that there are multiple member types with varying backgrounds in church organizing, members may presumably construe discourses in different ways which affect future meetings and interactions. As such, I pose an additional pair of interpretive questions to guide the study:

RQ2a: How do DB members perceivably interpret these discourses?

RQ2b: How do these interpretations affect member communication?

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter considers the ontological position that “organizations are communicatively constituted” and discusses its significance to the present study (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009, p. 1). Toward this end, I first summarize the foundations and streams of thought tied to this position and then discuss how this theoretical lens may inform our understanding of faith and church organizing. Next, I highlight key debates that pervade current theorizing in this vein and pose two additional research questions to guide this study.

A Constitutive Ontology

With the interpretive turn in organizational studies, communication scholars began to reexamine the predominant view of organizations as mere containers for communication (Bisel, 2009, Putnam & Nicotera, 2010). Inspired by Weick’s (1969/1979) admonition to view organization as a verb rather than a noun, communication scholars began explicitly (e.g., Weick & Browning, 1986) and implicitly (e.g., Deetz & Mumby, 1990) acknowledging the possibility that communication creates or produces organizations. Likewise, research in the area of organizational discourse also began to consider “the organizing property of communication” (Cheney, 2001, p. 453; see also, Cooren, 2000).

Thus, the ontological position encapsulated by the phrase *communication constitutes organization* (hereafter referred to as CCO) came into being (e.g., Cooren, 2000; Cheney, 2001; McPhee & Zaug, 2000/2009; J. R. Taylor and Van Every, 2000). Putnam, Nicotera, and McPhee (2009) unpack the essence of this constitution, stating, “Communicative constitution presumably embodies the material (composition or

elements), the formal (framing or forming), and the efficient causes (principles or rules for governing) that bring organizations into existence (p. 4).” While there is considerable divergence within CCO theorizing (see Bisel, 2010a; Putnam & McPhee, 2009), works under this banner share the collective goal to overcome the “idealized abstraction of an organization that is rarely questioned” (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010, p. 161). That is, CCO theorists attempt to go beyond the container metaphor to redefine “organization” in varying ways.

These various definitions or orientations toward organization are usefully summarized using Fairhurst and Putnam’s (2004) tripartite conceptualization of organization as (a) object or entity, (b) becoming or process, and (c) grounded in action (i.e., process from entity). Scholars who take an object orientation “focus on the outcome, product, or material consequences of this construction” while scholars who adopt a process orientation view communication as the single element that locally constitutes organization through social interaction (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009, p. 8). The first two orientations embrace CCO thought, but most contemporary work originates from the latter grounded in action perspective which will be further addressed later in this chapter (Bisel, 2009). At present, I provide an overview of the foundational works that serve as the building blocks for contemporary CCO thought.

Influential Works

Early CCO theorizing in organizational communication was concomitantly influenced by the works of McPhee and Zaugg (2000) and J. R. Taylor and Van Every (2000). These scholars share the common assumption that “communication calls organization into being,” yet they view this process of becoming very differently (Bisel,

2010a, p. 124). In their essay entitled “The Communication Constitution of Organizations: A Framework for Explanation”, McPhee and Zaug (2000) offered a broader, more top-down approach to the CCO question by arguing that organizations are constituted in four distinct but unified interaction processes or *flows*. The flows consist of two meso-level processes including *membership negotiation* (e.g., socialization and identity construction) and *activity coordination* (e.g., day-to-day interaction and mutual adjustment) and two macro-level processes including *organizational self-structuring* (e.g., design of formalized work processes and arrangements) and *institutional positioning* (e.g., presentation to and interaction with external publics). The authors note that each flow bears constitutive force, but they also contend that organizations are only constituted in the interaction of all four flows.

At the same time, J. R. Taylor and Van Every (2000) offered a different answer to the CCO question with their book, *The Emergent Organization: Communication as its Site and Surface*. In this book, as well as other works by J. R. Taylor and colleagues (e.g., Taylor, 1999, 2000; Taylor & Cooren, 1997; Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996), the authors take a comparatively more narrow approach to CCO, arguing that organizations are locally constituted in the process of co-orientation among human actors. In this view, organization is defined as a structured system of interaction that, in terms of McPhee and Zaug’s (2000) four flows, begins with *activity coordination*. This bottom up approach to organization was also adopted in a third phase of influential works by Cooren and colleagues (Cooren, 2000; 2004; 2006; Cooren, J. R. Taylor, & Van Every, 2006; Cooren, Thompson, Canestraro, & Bodor, 2006) who introduce the role of non-human

agents (e.g., objects, texts) in the constitutive process (see also K. L. Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009).

Since that time, Putnam and Nicotera (2009) assembled an edited volume that further examines the constitutive role of communication in organization. Using McPhee and Zaug's (2000) essay as a basis for continued theorizing and critique, this volume along with a recent forum in *Management Communication Quarterly* (see Bisel, 2010b) highlight the proliferation of CCO thought in the past decade. With this proliferation of thought, though, came debate about where organizational constitution begins and how it is ultimately accomplished through communication. Before addressing these debates, I first turn to a discussion of how CCO thought relates on the whole to the present study.

Application to Present Study

As demonstrated in Chapter Two's review of literature, there is a dearth of communication scholarship that addresses faith and its relationship to organizing and organizations. Considering that experiences with "calling" and supernatural connection (whether authentic or contrived) enter into the realm of social interaction almost exclusively through communication, it seems remiss that scholars have not explicitly investigated the role of faith-oriented communication in churches and other organizational contexts (Schultze, 2005). Conversely, there has been much more attention devoted to faith in the interdisciplinary scholarship, but most of these studies give negligible attention to communication. Rather, this body of literature tends to address faith as an unquestioned authority structure (e.g., Chaves, 1993; Schoenherr, 1987) or merely cites the presence/absence of faith-oriented activities and language in organizational settings (e.g., Nelson & Hiller, 1981; Vanderwoerd, 2004). Likewise, the

sociological literature typically defines church organizations as fixed entities that are largely influenced by formal structures such as institutional polity (e.g., McMullen, 1994; Monahan, 1999; Robbins, 1985). As such, these studies do not acknowledge or examine the role that members play in actively sustaining, transforming, and undermining these structures.

Thus, the literature to date fails to fully explicate the communicative dimensions of church organizations and acknowledge the role that faith and other D/discourses play in shaping relationships, objectives, tasks, identities and a variety of other organizational phenomena. As previous scholars have noted (e.g., Ballard & Gossett, 2008), a CCO framework may help to draw attention toward the communicative dimensions of organizational phenomena when the literature to date has failed to do so. In examining churches through a CCO lens, we may begin to acknowledge the complex way in which day-to-day member actions (i.e., *membership negotiation* and *activity coordination*) shape and are shaped by more enduring systems of influence (i.e., *institutional positioning* and *self-structuring*) (McPhee & Zaug, 2000/2009).

Alternatively, our understanding of the means by which communication constitutes organization may also be particularly enhanced through the examination of church contexts. One of the greatest critiques of CCO thought is that it is fixed in isolated extractions and the arbitrary notion that organizations are zero history (Weick, 2002, see also Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009). Arguably, no organizational context has more history than the church; it is perhaps the oldest and most institutionalized organization. Thus, it is an exemplary context to further interrogate this weakness. Thus, taking a CCO ontological stance toward the present study may mutually inform theorizing in this vein

as well as enhance our knowledge of the role that faith-centered as well as other D/discourses play in church organizing. In the next section, I attempt to highlight additional opportunities for CCO theorizing by addressing the nuances and questions that currently pervade this realm of thought.

Theoretical Distinctions and Debates

As CCO theory is continually evolving, there is still a considerable amount of uncertainty regarding “what this means, conceptually or empirically” (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009, p. 5). As such, scholars have struggled to clearly communicate with one another and collaboratively articulate the boundaries and dimensions of CCO thought. Clark, Cooren, Cornelissen, and Kuhn (2008) speak to these challenges, stating:

[CCO] enables a rethinking of ontological and epistemological positions on organization that can open up avenues for novel theoretical and empirical research... . [Yet] the wide array of approaches to understanding the communicative constitution of organization has led to conceptual confusion, challenges in traversing disciplinary boundaries, and to difficulties in using communication-based resources in ways that advance management and organization theory. (p. 161)

This is due, in part, to the fact that scholars have struggled to unite the broader top-down perspective originating from McPhee and Zaugg (2000) with the narrower bottom-up perspective stemming from J. R. Taylor and Van Every (2000). Putnam and Nicotera’s (2009) edited volume on this subject points to this division as some chapters essentially reinforce McPhee and Zaugg’s approach (e.g., McPhee & Iverson, 2009; Browning, Greene, Sitkin, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2009) while other chapters align more

with J. R. Taylor and Van Every (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009; J. R. Taylor, 2009). This division largely centers on two questions that are addressed in turn. The first question asks where constitution begins and ultimately transpires, and the second question asks how elements other than human talk in interaction (e.g., materials, entities, institutions) factor into the constitutive process. I grappled with both issues throughout the research process and attempt to offer further insight in the final chapter of this dissertation. At present, I synthesize the debates regarding both issues to provide a foundation for my discussion (see Chapter Seven).

The Nucleus of Constitution

One of the greatest points of contention in CCO theorizing to date is the ultimate communicative origin or foundation of organizational constitution. As was mentioned previously, McPhee and Zaug's (2000) original framework advances the general claim that constitution occurs at the nexus of all four flows. More recently, McPhee and Iverson (2009) suggested that although all four flows bear constitutive force, the *self-structuring* flow is the epicenter of organizational constitution. In a slightly different vein, Browning et al. (2009) endorsed McPhee and Zaug's general claim but additionally contended that constitution occurs at the complex intersection of two or more flows.

The four flow approach to the nucleus of constitution has been criticized by scholars who argue, "a comprehensive ontological explanation of organization must be able to distinguish these forms of coordinated action [i.e., gangs, social movements, etc.] from what we come to call organization *prima facie*" (Bisel, 2010a, p. 127). Notably, Sillince (2010) argues that each of McPhee and Zaug's (2000/2009) four flows could also be applied to markets, networks, communities, and social movements. However, the

critique that McPhee and Zaug's (2000/2009) four flows fail to represent a uniquely organizational framework has not been fully substantiated to date (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010). As Putnam and Nicotera (2010) rightly point out, McPhee and Zaug (2000/2009) do not claim that a single flow serves as a sufficient condition for organizing in the way that Sillince (2010) suggests they do. Rather, McPhee and Zaug (2000/2009) make it very clear that "organizations are constituted in four different communicative flows, not just one...with each making a different and important contribution" (p. 32).

J. R. Taylor and colleagues (Taylor and Van Every, 2000; Taylor, 2009) make a different claim regarding the nucleus of organizational constitution. These scholars theorize that co-orientation, which is generally subsumed under the *activity coordination* flow of McPhee and Zaug's framework, is the bedrock of organizational constitution and the starting point from which all other flows originate. They criticize the four flows approach as too abstractly housed in meso-level processes, and they call for more micro-level conceptualization of organizational constitution. Conversely, Bisel (2010) critiques this more narrow conception of CCO, arguing that "theories patterned after [J. R.] Taylor and Van Every (2000) seem to presume that the presence of specific grammatical structures fulfills both necessary and sufficient conditions to ensure the presence of organizing" (p. 127).

If Bisel is accurate in his critique, this is problematic on several levels. First, to theorize that communication is a sufficient condition for organizing would spawn conflation issues and the essentializing notion that communication equals organization (Bisel, 2009; Putnam and Nicotera, 2009). In the same vein, this represents a reductionist mode of thought that oversimplifies the complexity of organizational reality (Babbie,

2004). Further, to wholly and exclusively place communication in the center of organization would also diminish our discipline's relevance to other fields such as sociology and organization studies (Clark et al., 2008; see also, K. L. Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009). Bisel's (2010) critique, however, is arguably somewhat hasty. Putnam and Nicotera (2010) argue that Bisel and many CCO advocates and critics alike vacillate between different orientations toward organization as verb (i.e., process) and noun (i.e., entity), which leads to conceptual confusion and unclear argumentation. If CCO defines organization as *process*, communication may act as a sufficient condition for organizing; alternatively, if organization is defined as *entity*, the aforementioned questions necessitate that communication is a necessary (rather than sufficient) condition for organizing. J. R. Taylor and Van Every (2000) clearly conceptualize organization as process, stating that it "is not a *being*, but a *becoming*" (p. x, italics in original); thus, the fact that they conceptualize communication as a sufficient condition for organizing is not problematic. However, Bisel (2010) takes an organization as entity view to critique the theorizing and claims of J. R. Taylor and colleagues.³

Finally, Cooren and Fairhurst (2009) borrow J. R. Taylor and Van Every's (2000) term "scaling up" to address the nucleus of organizational constitution. They argue that constitution begins with local processes of organizing (i.e., coordinated action) among human actors and scales up to organization as entity. Nevertheless, McPhee and colleagues (McPhee and Iverson, 2009; Putnam & McPhee, 2009) take issue with Cooren and Fairhurst's (2009) logic on scaling up which will be further addressed in the next section of this chapter. Additionally, critics of this more micro-level position argue that

³ Hence, I use the term "organization" to indicate the entity in process view and "organizing" to indicate the process view. See Chapter 1 (Chapter Overview and Key Terms) for further discussion.

while Cooren and colleagues account for the communicative constitution of interpersonal relationships, they fall short of fully accounting for the constitution of complex organizations (see Bisel, 2010a). Thus, the first debate is whether constitution proceeds from the top down or the bottom up and the problematic implications of each. This conflict points to a second major debate which centers on the structure-agency dualism in organizational constitution.

Beyond Talk: Materiality, Agency, and Conditions for Organization

This question concerns itself with the “staying power of texts or their capacity to remain” and the reality that “what happens in the *here and now* always contaminates and is contaminated by the *there and then*” (Putnam & Cooren, 2004, p. 324, italics in original). This question also concerns itself with who and what rightfully communicate in the constitutive process. Bisel (2009) offers a good starting point for this discussion with his discussion of duality theorizing in organizational discourse research. This line of work, while not explicitly tied to CCO, directly relates to the issues of agency and structure that must be addressed in CCO theorizing. Noting that most of the mature work in this area falls within Fairhurst and Putnam’s (2004) *grounded in action* orientation toward organizational discourse that treats agency and structure as mutually constitutive of organization, Bisel describes two approaches to agency-structure that also characterize the nuance among CCO camps.

The first approach, *structured in action* (SIA), encompasses the view that “organization emerges from within accounting practices accomplished in everyday talk” (Bisel, 2009, p. 619). Thus, SIA approaches see individuals as possessing a considerable degree of authority and intentionality in coordinating actions toward the constitution of

organizations. Bisel (2009; 2010) critiques the SIA approach by drawing attention to the issue of (dis)organization. He claims that CCO work to date demonstrates an *organizing bias*, what he describes as “the tendency of organizational communication research to see communication as constituting order and coordinated action rather than disorder and an inability to coordinate action” (Bisel, 2009, pp. 631-632). Putnam and Nicotera (2010) take issue with this critique, though, and point out “Bisel presumes that organization... and being organized are synonymous. The irony of communication is that it can separate at the same time it connects. Even in the midst of ‘ineffective and inefficient interaction,’ organizing still occurs” (p. 160).

The second approach, *acted in structure* (AIS), “presume[s] organization emerges from within the narrative structure of language use, which compels human and nonhuman agents via speech acts to fulfill manipulation and competence requirements” (Bisel, 2009, p. 621). AIS studies presume that member actions are constrained by deep structures (i.e., institutions), and, therefore, individual agency is low and intentionality is not a central concern in organizational constitution. Likewise, they entertain the notion that non-human materials and objects may act as agents (i.e., communicators) in the constitutive process (e.g., Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009). For example, scholars in this vein may conclude that organizational policies are endowed with agency by human actors who interact with them in processes of organizing (e.g., Castor & Cooren, 2006).

These nuanced approaches highlight related questions regarding how materiality (e.g., buildings, bodies, policy documents) and institutional structures (e.g., economic, cultural, political) interact with human communicators in processes of organizational constitution (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2008; Putnam & Nicotera, 2010; Reed, 2010;

Sewell, 2010). Sewell (2010) incorporates interdisciplinary works to make the argument that CCO theories would be strengthened by considering the fact that, while institutions may not think or communicate per se, they do play a central role in shaping human communication and organizational constitution. Drawing upon work by anthropologist Mary Douglas (1986), for example, Sewell argues that taken for granted structures powerfully influence the degree of agency that human actors possess in organizing processes. Putnam and Nicotera (2010) concede this point, acknowledging that while CCO perspectives have typically “placed issues of power and control in the background,” future CCO theorizing needs to better define its relationship with institutions and materiality (p. 162).

Offering one answer to this question, Cooren and Fairhurst (2009) argue that in the scaling up process of constitution, organizations act as agents with the ability to communicate and stabilize structures through human actors. This perspective also views institutional texts as a form of agency that influences the way organizations are constituted and reconstituted (Putnam & Cooren, 2004; see also Giddens, 1984). Conversely, scholars aligned with McPhee and Zaug (2000) would likely argue that a material structure is not an agent but a “sign or resource that mediates actions and functions” (Putnam & McPhee, 2009, p. 189). This position appears to be similar to Putnam and Nicotera’s (2010) conceptualization of objects “as an outgrowth or consequence of the meeting of the material and ideational worlds” (p. 163; see also K. L. Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009). Similarly, Kärreman and Alvesson (2008) note that while “cars, trains, bridges, machines, [and] meals” are not created wholly in

communication, the consequential meaning of these objects for organizations does not exist detached from communication (p. 322).

In sum, while Cooren and colleagues contend that entities other than humans may function as agents in the constitutive process, the alternative stance would argue, for example, that organizational members (exclusively endowed with human agency) use rhetorical strategies which draw upon non-human elements (e.g., policies) to negotiate membership, coordinate activity, structure interaction, and position themselves to external publics (i.e., organize) (Bisel, 2009; McPhee & Zaug, 2000/2009). In the final section of this chapter, I attempt to synthesize these and the aforementioned debates and advance several research questions to prompt continued insight.

Research Questions

Because scholars “often become mired in complexity [and] immersed in abstract language” they are often unable to “articulate similarities and differences among [CCO] perspectives” (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009, p. 2). This review attempted to articulate some of the key differences in CCO thought, but it also intimated that much of this debate is “almost like splitting hairs” (Putnam & McPhee, 2009, p. 191). Putnam and McPhee (2009) summarize the similarities and differences in the two major camps of CCO thought as:

At the level of the collective per se, these CCO approaches seem very close. Yet, McPhee and Iverson differ from [J. R.] Taylor in placing emphasis on the communicative constituted rules and resource that serve as building blocks for the four flows in this system. (p. 191)

Rather than focusing on the similarities, though, scholars continue to “talk past each other” (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010, p. 159) by getting caught up in chicken-or-the-egg debates reminiscent of the structure-agency arguments in our field’s history (see Conrad & Haynes, 2001; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). Further, scholars continue to invoke different and vaguely identified meanings of *organization* and *constitution* (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010). The confusion caused by alternating between organization as verb and noun was addresses previously; likewise, CCO works to date have seldom explicitly articulated what they mean in their use of the term (see McPhee and Zaug, 2000/2009 and Putnam, Nicotera, and McPhee, 2009 for exceptions). This creates more grounds for talking past one another as some scholars conceptualize *constitution* weakly (i.e., communication has a limited influence on organizational constitution) while others treat it more strongly (i.e., communication wholly constitutes the organization) (see Kärreman & Alvesson; 2008).

More scholars need to heed Bisel’s (2009) call to “get on with” with the act of data collection and analysis (see also, Silverman, 1989; Weick, 2002). As Bisel (2009) rightly points out, “such a focus is useful only to the extent that it helps researchers locate the phenomena of study in the field or laboratory. Ontological arguments are not an end in and of themselves” (p. 628). Thus, I pose the following research question:

RQ3a: In what ways does the present study enhance and/or challenge current theorizing on the communicative constitution of organizations?

CCO thought also has the potential to enhance our understanding of the communicative dimensions of faith and church organizing. At present, though, there is only fragmented

understanding of how communication calls church organizations into being. Thus, I pose a final interrelated research question:

RQ3b: What role does communication play in constituting Downtown Baptist? This research question is intentionally vague to allow for consideration of the multiple perspectives and debates that characterize CCO theorizing to date. This question considers the micro-, meso-, and macro-level dimensions of communication and also allows for consideration of the role that materiality may play in the organization's constitution. In sum, this question attempts to consider multiple levels, moving from "discourse" to 'Discourse' and back again" rather than isolating inquiry as much of the literature to date has done (Putnam & Cooren, 2004, p. 329).

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes and defends the methodological choices that guided this study. I first provide a rationale for the appropriateness of a case study approach as well as the particular case selected for inquiry. Following this, I describe the research setting and its institutional context. In the third section I expound on the objects of inquiry: formal meetings, semi-structured interviews, and organizational/institutional literature. Finally, I discuss the discursive and narrative analyses used to interrogate the case study data, and I highlight the steps taken to ensure a rigorous and meaningful analysis.

Rationale

To explore the relationship between faith, communication, and organization I employed an extended case study approach, “a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 534). Organizational communication scholars have used case studies to enhance our understanding of phenomena including organizational control (Barker, 1993); knowledge management (Iverson & McPhee, 2008), workplace democracy (Hoffman, 2002), member commitment (Larkey & Morrill, 1995), group interaction (see Putnam & Stohl, 1990), crisis management (S. J. Tracy, 2007), and technology use (Vaast, 2004), to name a few. Nonetheless, there is also skepticism in the field regarding the value of case study methods. Thus, it is necessary for researchers to more clearly articulate the contribution that case studies offer to the scholarly literature. In this section, I address several chief critiques of case studies, demonstrate the appropriateness of this method for the present study, and discuss why the particular case was selected for inquiry.

Case Studies: Critiques and Contributions

Scholars have debated the legitimacy of case studies in academic research for decades (see Campbell, 1975; Eisenhardt, 1989). Opponents of the case study approach argue that they fail to (a) offer generalizable conclusions about causal relationships, (b) safeguard against researcher bias, and (c) provide little to no theoretical contribution. While each of these critiques has some merit, I contend that there is greater value to the case study that goes beyond each of these criticisms.

First, I acknowledge scholars' assessments that case studies fail to provide generalizable insight into causal relationships among phenomena (e.g., Campbell, 1975; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982). It is true that a single case study, no matter how rigorous it may be, cannot produce universal knowledge about causality. However, I depart from the view that single-shot case studies "have such a total absence of control as to be of almost no scientific value" (Campbell, 1975, p. 179). This objectivist "truth value" is only one of the contributions of empirical research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; see also, Johnson, 1999). Conversely, Chen and Pearce (1995) contend that, "rather than functioning as a more or less useful basis for generalization, the criterion by which a case study is evaluated is its ability to explicate the richness and particularity of what it describes" (p. 141). Geertz (1973) refers to this as the value of thick description, the view that research is not always "an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (p. 4). In the field of organizational communication, Tompkins' (2007) extended case study of the NASA space program serves as a prototype for the meaning that may be produced by thick description. In the same way that Tompkins' work offered what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as transferable

understanding of best (and worst) organizational practices, this case study employs thick description to further understanding of the role that non-rational communicative phenomena such as faith-centered discourse may play in the constitution of organizations.

A second interrelated critique is that case study research offers no theoretical contribution (see Campbell, 1975). As with any type of research, there are likely case studies that have failed to provide theoretical insight, but this general criticism is without merit. On the contrary, case studies have been productively employed for theory testing and building (see Eisenhardt, 1989). For example, Lynch (2002) draws heavily from case studies to advance his model of the functions of humor in organizations. Admittedly, though, case study research must demonstrate rigor in its design and written product in order for it to extend and refine theory (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). One way that researchers can do this is to account for contingencies in their claims (Cheney, 2000). I discuss the efforts taken in this case study to produce a rigorous and theoretically substantive analysis in the final section of this chapter.

A third critique of case studies is that they are riddled with bias (see Campbell, 1975). Again, there have likely been case studies in which the contribution is hampered by the researchers' own subjectivities. However, all qualitative work is, to a degree, inherently biased. The qualitative researcher's intimate relationship with the research context shatters the illusion of the unaffected, detached observer. As with qualitative research, the case study researcher should be aware of her own biases and reflexively engage in critical reflection to account for this throughout the research process (Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 1999). There is debate about how we should actually "flex

our reflexivities”, though (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003, p. 169). As such, I address my efforts toward reflexivity in the final section of this chapter.

In sum, case studies continue to be subjected to many of the same critiques of all interpretive, qualitative research. Nonetheless, rigorous and reflexive case studies continue to provide theoretical and practical insight into a variety of organizational communication phenomena. I specifically chose a case study approach for this study because it “provides the methodological design necessary to explore the emergence and reproduction of discursive formation as manifested across multiple levels and contexts” (Broadfoot, Deetz, & Anderson, 2004, p. 198). I used what Lindlof and Taylor (2002) refer to as critical case sampling wherein the researcher examines a “case that exemplifies a theoretical or practical problem” (p. 130). An appropriate critical case features circumstances and constraints found in other similar cases but in more striking form. The subsequent section explains why my site represented a fitting critical case.

Site for Study

The Southern Baptist Church in general and, more specifically, a central Texas church I call Downtown Baptist (DB) served as the critical case for this study. As the largest mainline Protestant denomination in the United States today (United Council of Churches, 2007), I chose this particular type of church organization for several reasons. First, I selected the Southern Baptist church because its form of institutional governance (i.e., polity) offers unique insight into *membership negotiation* and *reflexive self-structuring*, two of the major communication flows that comprise McPhee and Zaugg’s (2000/2009) CCO framework. Specifically, this denomination adheres to a

congregationalist polity which is described in the Southern Baptist Convention's (2000) formal proclamation of faith, the Baptist Faith and Message, as:

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel... . Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through *democratic processes*. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. (Article VI: The Church, emphasis added)

This democratic structure requires the participation of multiple member types (e.g., pastoral staff and lay volunteers) with traditionally very distinct statuses in organizational hierarchy. Thus, this dynamic makes for a rich examination of the relationship between membership negotiation and self-structuring.

My second reason for examining a Southern Baptist church is for its denomination's espoused emphasis on faith-oriented forces. That is, the Southern Baptist Convention claims that all congregational members, not just pastors, have direct access to God's influence as "believer priests." This *priesthood of the believer* Protestant theology is the idea that all church members:

...who believe in Jesus become priests with direct access to God... . Thus decisions are made by the community of priests seeking to know the will of the head of the church, the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. They do this by prayer, Bible study, meditation, discussion and decision. (Pinson & Tinker, 2005a, Article 7)

Thus, according to denominational doctrine, every participant in organizational decision-making presumably has unmediated access to God's influence through "prayer, bible study, [and] meditation" and can claim this divine yet intangible influence in organizational "discussion and decision" (see also Conrad, 1988; Ingram, 1981; Monahan, 1999). This espoused value, whether manifest or latent in group interaction, presents an opportunity to examine members' constructions of and responses to faith-oriented discourse in the process of organizing.

Beyond the Southern Baptist denomination, I selected Downtown Baptist as the specific research site for two reasons. First, its size requires multiple levels of influence and interaction among organizational members which ensured multiple opportunities to examine member interaction. To serve the almost 6,500 members of the church, there are 20 full-time staff members who attend weekly staff and departmental meetings and nine standing committees of nine members each who convene at least once per quarter. While other American churches may be smaller in scale, this staff/lay leader structure and meeting paradigm is characteristic of churches of all sizes (see Leeman, 2006).

Second, the overall circumstances at Downtown Baptist provide a critical reference point for the exigencies facing many church organizations in the United States today. For example, this largely traditional church recently made the significant transition to a more contemporary style of worship that includes band instruments (e.g., guitar, drums) and increased technology use (e.g., PowerPoints and video clips). The issue of worship style is often a contentious subject, provoking theological debates about God's will and the overall identity of the church (see Wortmann & Schrader, 2007). In addition to worship changes, Downtown Baptist is also a critical case in that the church is working

through financial issues associated with budgetary constraints and decreased giving, a second major issue that is facing many churches, not to mention many other organizations, today (Sataline, 2007). Further, as with many other churches, DB is also gradually shifting its outreach toward more local, community-based efforts, which may potentially lessen the emphasis on larger institutional giving (e.g., sending funds to support efforts of the Baptist General Convention) (Day, 2009). The centrality of mission in the church and the implications of this shift make it an interesting site for scholars who study similar issues in non-profit organizations (NPOs) as well (see Lewis, 2005).

In sum, the Baptist denominational structure and theology as well as the size and circumstances present at Downtown Baptist make it a fitting critical case as defined by Lindlof and B. C. Taylor (2002). Now that I've explained how this site serves as an appropriate case, I will provide some pertinent information about the site and its institutional context.

Research Setting

Baptist Churches

There are several organizational aspects of Baptist doctrine that are pertinent to this study. Baptists defend these aspects as scripturally informed and consistent with Jesus Christ's teachings and leadership. Perhaps the most recognizable aspect is the promotion of congregational governance, a democratic approach that encourages church members to exercise equal responsibility and influence over organizational decision-making and action. This notion of equal voice evokes a unique interplay of divine, pastoral, deacon, and lay member influence. Pertaining to the divine realm of influence, Baptist doctrine states that "only Christ is 'in charge' of his church" (Pinson & Tinker,

2005b, Article 11). As such, pastors are viewed as playing the important role of “servant, spiritual leadership,” a position that should be respected by members but not accepted with complete and unquestioned authority. Similarly, Pinson and Tinker (2005b) state that deacons are also meant to be servants and not a ruling body of the church. Finally, congregational members are charged with the responsibility “to seek and follow Christ’s will for the church” (Article 11). Because they are viewed as “believer priests,” church members are supposed to have equal access to God’s influence as members of the pastoral staff; hence, they are intended to have equal influence over church decisions.

Baptist congregational polity is less clear about how this influence is achieved and regulated, though. Denominational leaders acknowledge that it may not be feasible for every member to participate in every church decision (see Pinson & Tinker, 2005b). Thus, many Baptist churches create a constitution and bylaws stipulating how congregational members may be represented and participate in decision-making processes. Though it varies by church, representation is often accomplished through the use of standing (e.g., budget committee) and special service committees (e.g., pastoral search committee), and participation is typically facilitated by convening quarterly business meetings wherein members have the opportunity to voice opinions and ask questions. These meetings are usually held after a Sunday evening service, utilize a modified version of Robert’s Rules of Order, and feature brief reports from standing committees.

A final noteworthy aspect of Baptist congregational polity is the significant influence on local autonomy, or self-directed, independently governed churches. Though broader organizational bodies exist such as the Baptist General Convention of Texas

(BGCT) and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), it is important to note that these regional bodies cannot control individual congregations. This notion of autonomy is so central to the denomination that “for any one of these organizations to attempt to exercise control over an individual church is to violate a basic Baptist conviction about polity” (Pinson & Tinker, 2005c, Article 13). Rather, individual congregations are encouraged to voluntarily cooperate (i.e., affiliate) with larger convention bodies, which formed in the mid-1800s.

Downtown Baptist

As its name suggests, Downtown Baptist is an urban church with a long-standing presence in the city. It was established in 1901 and is one of the oldest and most recognized Baptist churches in the Central Texas area. With a membership of over 6,500 and a budget of almost \$3,000,000 (fiscal year 2009-2010), it is also one of the largest and most affluent churches in the community. Downtown Baptist advertises the broad mission statement to “love God, love others, and make His love known,” and its membership is comprised largely of upper middle-class families. As such, the church’s prominent ministries are geared toward children, youth, college students, couples, and senior adults.

Historically, Downtown Baptist has been a church of tradition and consistency. Only 12 pastors have served throughout its 109 year existence, and it still operates from its founding location (though property has been added and renovated). DB’s relationship with larger denominational entities is characterized in church literature as follows: “Our church primarily supports BGCT [Baptist General Convention of Texas] efforts, but joins the cooperative effort of the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program and

Missions, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship...as well as other local ministry/mission works.” The church currently sends delegates and funds to both the BGCT and the Southern Baptist Convention, though it has decreased its funds in recent years.

In 2005, the pastor for the previous 25 years retired. Pastor Paul was beloved and renowned not only among the church but the greater community. With a reputation of being a benevolent but largely authoritarian leader, Pastor Paul Longfellow was highly involved in nearly all aspects of church decision-making. Consequently, there was considerably less congregational influence on programming and administrative church matters; committees and church-wide business meetings still convened, but these forums were more symbolic than serviceable in nature. Upon Pastor Paul’s retirement, though, the committees were faced with the daunting and unfamiliar task of “running” the church. Congregational members were thrust into administrative duties such as establishing an annual budget, paying bills, dispensing payroll, and overseeing the remaining staff, all while they were attempting to find a new pastor.

Committee members and other congregational leaders took on these roles for more than two years before they hired Pastor Matthew Dalton in the summer of 2007. Pastor Matthew previously served at a nearby suburban church for 11 years and is considerably younger than Pastor Paul. Along with this hire there have been many changes to the Downtown Baptist governance and programming throughout the past three years. Notable changes include: (a) hiring new administrative, educational, and youth pastors to replace those who left shortly before or after Pastor Matthew’s arrival, (b) reducing the number of standing committees from 29 to nine and espousing efforts to increase congregational influence in church decision-making, (c) the addition of a

contemporary service to the Sunday morning worship format, and (d) a shift toward more locally-based mission and outreach efforts (e.g., forming a partnership with a local rehabilitation center for drug and alcohol abuse).

Today, Downtown Baptist is sustaining its largest membership in years. As it shifts slightly away from its traditional roots, denominational ties, and governance habits of a 25-year leadership, though, the church is facing significant questions about its identity and mission. I was first introduced to DB in the winter after Pastor Matthew's arrival when I helped a friend with a weekend youth retreat. Though I do not attend this church nor am I Baptist, I continue to volunteer at this annual retreat and have, thus, maintained acquaintances with Pastor Matthew and several other church members. In the following section, I describe my process for negotiating access to data collection and the parameters of my involvement with the organization and its staff/members.

Data Collection

In the months prior to data collection, I contacted Pastor Matthew to discuss his potential interest in participating in the study. After an initial email response, I met with Pastor Matthew at his office to discuss the purpose of the study, the expectations for my involvement with prospective participants, and the ways that Downtown Baptist may potentially benefit from this extended case study. The pastor was enthusiastic about the study and asked me to make a subsequent presentation to his pastoral staff at their weekly meeting. After this meeting, I received approval to engage in a 5-month process of data collection involving observation of organizational meetings and individual interviews (see Appendix A for site approval letter). In order to collect sufficient data, I observed meetings and interviewed participants until I was no longer surprised by what I

encountered (Janesick, 2000; Lindlof & B. C. Taylor, 2002). In the remainder of this section, I describe the corpus of data included in this study and articulate why and how this data was obtained.

Observation

Procedures for obtaining consent. Prior to beginning my observational work, Pastor Matthew and the nine additional members of the pastoral staff agreed to contact prospective participants (e.g., support staff, associate pastors, committee members, deacons) and provide them with information about the study. Pastors contacted prospective participants for each of their ministry areas by email to share this information; the subject consent form (Appendix B) was included as an attachment to inform prospective participants of their rights to privacy and anonymity. Upon my first observation of a particular group, I was introduced to the members in attendance by the leader of the meeting. Leaders were typically pastoral staff (e.g., the college pastor) or committee chairs (e.g., Finance Committee chair). In the event that a leader was a committee chair, the pastoral staff advisor for that committee would contact the chair prior to the meeting to ensure that the he or she was comfortable with my presence.

In the leader's introduction, he or she would typically provide a brief overview of the purpose of my study and then give me an opportunity to discuss options for participation. Specifically, I informed them that they had three options: (a) to decline participation, in which case they would not be audio-taped or included in my field notes, (b) to agree to participate but decline from being audio-taped, or (c) to agree to participate and be audio-taped with proper notice by the researcher. Prospective participants were also given the opportunity to indicate on the consent form if they were

amenable to being interviewed at a later date. Because the prospective participants had already received the consent form via email, they seldom voiced additional questions and/or concerns even though they were given an opportunity to do so.

All of the members observed throughout this case study agreed to be observed (n=88); of these participants, five members declined to be audio-taped. Thus, I refrained from audio-taping any meeting in which these five members were present. There were two meeting contexts in which informed consent was not obtained for every member present. The first context was the deacons meeting wherein approximately 50-60 men were typically in attendance. Prior to this meeting, Pastor Matthew and the deacon chair agreed that consent was not necessary; they explained that congregational members observed the deacon's meetings often, and I would not be invading their privacy by doing so. I was, however, introduced at the beginning of the deacons meeting in a manner similar to the protocol described above. The second context that I did not obtain consent for was the regularly scheduled church-wide business meeting. This is a public forum that any and all individuals are invited to attend; thus, the pastoral staff agreed that I did not need to obtain consent forms for these occasions.

Researcher involvement. Throughout the observational process I functioned chiefly as a “natural who watches, listens, and records communicative conduct in a natural setting” (Philipsen, 1992, p. 7). As such, I acted in the capacity of what Adler and Adler (1998) characterize as an “observer as participant,” a researcher who enters the site for the purpose of data gathering and remains largely detached from the lives of the organizational members. Because my chief objective was to observe and preserve the natural discursive interactions of the organizational members, I did not act as a

participant observer who becomes “integrated into the routines and subjective realities of the group” (Lindlof & B. C. Taylor, 2002, p. 145). Though I was acquainted with some participants prior to the study and engaged in casual conversation with many participants before and after meetings, I would silently observe apart from the immediate interaction during the actual meeting (e.g., sit in a chair on the side of the room). These prior acquaintances and outside interactions helped me to garner the participants’ trust and encourage them to act naturally during observations, but it also fostered a degree of separation so that I could engage in the “soft technology of systematic observation” during organizational meetings (Weick, 1985, p. 568).

Forms of observational data. In pursuit of this task, I took extensive field notes to inform my analysis. Following the guide of Van Maanen (1988), I treated my field notes as a commentary of what happened during the meetings, recording both objective observations of communicative behavior as well as subjective analyses of those behaviors. Thus, my field notes formed a record of communicative interaction as well as “a running commentary” that provided an “important means of accomplishing the overlap between data collection and analysis” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 538). In addition to field notes, I also recorded three meetings: one weekly pastoral staff meeting, one children’s ministry staff meeting, and one Finance Committee meeting. These three meetings represent the range of meeting types (pastoral staff, ministry support staff, and committee) that regularly convene at Downtown Baptist. I transcribed each audio-file within 24 hours of the meeting so that I could accurately identify different voices from the interaction. The transcriptions were generally verbatim, including words, audible vocal sounds (e.g., um, huh), interruptions, and extended pauses; as the analysis was not

as detailed as conversation analytic approaches, though, I did not account for subtleties such as exact timing and intonation (see Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). The specific methods of data analysis are detailed in the next major section of this chapter.

Scope of observational data. Though the aforementioned meeting types comprise the majority of the organizational meetings at Downtown Baptist, there were additional meeting types included in this study. Together, this consisted of 6 general categories of meetings that were observed: pastoral staff (n=6), ministry support staff (n=4), ministry support volunteers (n=1), deacons (n=2), church-wide business (n=3), and standing committees (n=10). All of these meetings exemplified Schwartzman's (1989) definition of meetings as communicative events that involves three or more people convened to address issues pertaining to the functioning of the group or connected entities (other organizations; community, etc.).

In total, I attended 26 meetings and logged 37 hours observing formal organizational meetings. Consistent with critical case sampling, I observed some types of meetings more than others (Lindlof & B. C. Taylor, 2002; see also, Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, I repeatedly observed groups who influenced and were affected by one of DB's most critical and timely issues, the church's financial health. For example, I observed multiple Finance Committee meetings and Personnel meetings, two groups who respectively influenced and were affected by the current financial situation. I also observed additional meetings when more data was needed to better understand the discursive practices of a particular group. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the specific meetings observed during the course of this study, and Appendix C provides a brief summary of each meeting. These summaries supplemented my field

notes and, as Eisenhardt (1989) suggests, helped manage the volume of data and facilitate insight into the similarities and differences among different meetings.

Table 4.1

Meetings Included in Observational Data

General type	Specific type	Number of meetings observed	Hours observed
Pastoral staff	Full staff	5	9.25
	Education staff	1	2.00
Ministry support staff	Recreation staff	1	0.75
	Childcare staff	2	3.00
	College staff	1	1.00
Ministry support volunteers	College volunteers	1	1.00
Deacons		2	3.00
Church-wide business		3	3.00
Committees	Building & Grounds	1	1.00
	Children's	1	1.50
	Finance	2	3.00
	Leadership Enlistment	1	1.50
	Missions	1	2.00
	Personnel	2	3.00
	Senior Adults	1	1.00
	Youth	1	1.00
	Total	26	37.00

In addition to these formal meeting observations, I accumulated approximately 15 hours of observation at other organizational activities (i.e., worship services, meals and social events, informal conversations before and after meetings). These observations were not the central focus of my analysis, but they helped further my understanding of member communication and its influence on the organization of the church. In total, I logged 52 hours of site observation, producing 3.5 hours of audio-taped meeting interaction and 102 pages of typed, single-spaced field notes.

Interviews

After observing meetings for two months, I began conducting individual interviews with staff and lay leader participants. I conducted most of my interviews after I had already observed the participant in a meeting and he/she had indicated willingness to be interviewed on his/her subject consent form. I conducted these interviews later in the research process for several reasons. First, I did not want participants to become overly conscious of their behavior and potentially alter it during subsequent observations. Also, I used my knowledge of pertinent meeting interactions to shape follow up questions about the member's reactions and responses to these previous meetings. Likewise, I occasionally utilized interview time to ask clarification questions regarding things I had observed.

Interview participants. A total of 40 participants took part in individual interviews. The range of participants fell into three general organizational roles or positions: Pastoral staff (n=13), additional support staff (n=14), and congregational leaders (n=13) which include committee chairs/members and deacons. Table 4.2 provides a list of the interview participants and their roles within the organization. Pastoral staff members, including head and associate pastors, were included in the study because they are central influences in the discursive decision-making processes and overall organization of the church (Schoenherr, 1987). Likewise, members of the additional support staff comprised of assistants, directors, and part-time employees were also included in the study because they interact closely with the pastoral staff to shape, implement, enforce, and, at times, even resist organizational decisions and programs. As several pastoral staff attested to during the course of this study, support staff are the ones

Table 4.2

Interview Participant Characteristics

Participant ^a	Central role at DB	Additional role(s)
	<u>Head pastoral staff</u>	
Pastor Matthew	Pastor	Advisor for long-range planning and Personnel Committees; supervisor of head pastoral staff
Pastor Walter	Associate pastor	
Pastor Peter	Administrative pastor	Advisor for building/grounds, Finance, and long-range planning committees; facilitates weekly pastoral staff meetings
Pastor Donald	Music minister	Advisor for long range-planning committee
Pastor Martin	Recreation/missions minister	Advisor for Missions Committee
Pastor Joe	Education minister	Advisor for leadership enlistment, sr. adult, & long-range planning committees; supervisor of children's, youth, and college ministers
Pastor Tricia	Children's minister	Advisor for Children's Committee; supervisor of daycare and children's ministry staff
Pastor Chris	Youth minister	Advisor for Youth Committee
Pastor Blake	Youth minister (ex-staff member) ^b	Advisor for Youth Committee (f) ^c
Pastor Austin	College minister	College staff supervisor; Recreation associate (f)
	<u>Associate pastoral staff</u>	
Emily	Recreation associate	Female youth ministry leader (informal role)
Bradley	Youth associate	
Cody	College associate (incoming)	Sunday morning worship leader
Alex	College associate (outgoing)	
	<u>Ministry support staff</u>	
Dorothy	Pastoral assistant	
Shirley	Finance assistant	
Faith	Music assistant	
Anne	Education assistant	
Holly	Children's assistant	
Violet	Youth/college assistant	
Hazel	Church receptionist	Coordinator of poverty outreach ministry
Carrie	Rec. center receptionist	
Howard	Director of media	
Dorothy	Director of daycare center	
Betsy	Director of daycare center (ex-staff) ^b	Children's, Missions, & Youth Committee member (f)
Olivia	Director of preschool program	
Lilly	Children's choir director	
Grant	Worship leader	
Rich	Recreation assistant	
	<u>Congregational leaders</u>	
Nelson	Finance Committee chair	Deacon
Butch	Finance Committee member	
Jeff	Personnel Committee chair	
Philip	Missions Committee chair	Deacon
William	Leadership enlistment chair	Deacon; Finance & Children's Committee member (f)
Hope	Children's Committee chair	
Owen	Youth Committee chair	Deacon; Children's & Personnel Committee member (f)
George	Sr. adult chair	Deacon; Finance & Building and Grounds Committee member (f)
Tom	Constitution/bylaws committee member	Deacon chair (f); Finance, Leadership Enlistment, Long-Range Planning committee member (f)
Billy	Building/grounds committee chair	Deacon
Charles	Deacon chair	Finance, Personnel, and Leadership Enlistment Committee member (f)

^aAll participant names are pseudonyms. / ^bInformant interview participant / ^cIndicates former role

who “keep the doors open” and “hold everything together.” Finally, congregational leaders (i.e., committee chairs, committee members, and deacons) were also included in the study because of their elevated status and influence in the Baptist church. As “believer priests,” these organizational members are presumably an important part of the communicative constitution of the organization (Conrad, 1988; Pinson & Tinker, 2005a).

Interview protocol. The process for scheduling an interview was typically two-fold. First, the appropriate pastoral contact would send an email to the prospective participant (carbon copying me, as well) encouraging them to take part in the interview if they so desired. Next, I would follow up with the prospective participant to arrange an interview time and location. All pastoral and support staff participants were interviewed at the church, and most of the congregational leader participants were interviewed at their workplaces or a nearby café. Interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to 90 minutes with the average interview lasting approximately 55 minutes.

I employed a semi-structured approach for 38 of the interviews, combining elements of both the structured and unstructured approaches described by Fontana & Frey (2000). Interviews were structured in that the interview was preplanned and the questions were largely predetermined (see Appendix D for interview guides). However, respondents were given the opportunity to elaborate on questions and even ask their own questions. Likewise, I often included probing questions that were not included in the initial interview schedule to gather additional insight into members’ responses. For example, a participant may struggle to answer a general pre-planned question (e.g., Who or what influences how you make decisions about church issues?), so I would refocus the question into a specific lived or hypothetical scenario (e.g., When the church staff/leaders

were trying to decide whether or not to change the Sunday morning worship style, how did you decide what should be done?). All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed using the same procedure that was implemented for recorded meetings. One exception to the aforementioned procedure is that two graduate students helped me to transcribe the interview data. These transcriptionists were given a key to aid them in their transcription, and I cross-checked excerpts of each of their transcriptions with the audio-recording to ensure that the transcriptions were complete. Together, the graduate students transcribed 14 of the 38 interviews and I transcribed the remaining 24 interviews.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, I conducted informant interviews (Lindlof, 1995; Lindlof & B. C. Taylor, 2002) with two participants I refer to as Stephen, a former pastor at DB, and Betsy, a former support staff and committee member. Lindlof (1995) describes informants as participants who may have:

more experience in certain settings... . display a facility with the local language, and are more willing than others to assist with project goals. Occasionally, a person might be a good source because of his or her marginal status; a singular or deviant view can help the researcher reconstruct the rationality of what is considered to be normal in the scene. Some combination of these qualities can make a good informant. (p. 171)

Both Stephen and Betsy were good informants in that they have extensive experience with the church as well as the communicative behaviors of staff and congregational leaders. Stephen served as the youth pastor at DB for five years, both under the former leadership of Pastor Paul and the current leadership of Pastor Matthew. He created the Youth Committee and served as its advisor, was involved in weekly pastoral staff

meetings, and witnessed first-hand the changes that have occurred at Downtown Baptist in recent years (e.g., move to local missions and contemporary worship). Stephen left the church two years ago due to what he characterizes as “personality conflicts” with Pastor Matthew, but Stephen still maintains relationships with numerous pastors and congregational leaders in the church.

Alternatively, Betsy is a current member of the church and a former Director of the Downtown Baptist daycare center. Betsy has been a member of the church for over 50 years, and both she and her husband George (Sr. Adult Committee Chair) have served on numerous standing committees throughout their time at DB. I have known Stephen for 10 years, but I did not know Betsy prior to conducting this study. I met Betsy about three months into my data collection when I visited her home to interview her husband. During our conversation, we discovered that she knew one of my family members for many years; this connection created a camaraderie that eventually led to her informant status. Betsy took great interest in my research and invited me to contact her with subsequent questions throughout my study. By using two informants with different experiences in the organization, I gathered more well-rounded insight into my research questions (Lindlof, 1995).

Organizational Literature

My final source of data for this study is organizational literature produced specifically by Downtown Baptist and the broader Baptist denomination. These pieces of data were used to analyze the nature and influence of formalized policies and procedures [i.e., the *reflexive self-structuring* flow of McPhee & Zaug’s (2000/2009) framework] on organizational communication processes, and they also helped to further my

understanding of the case study context. There were two denominational documents examined in this study: the Baptist Faith and Message, a guiding statement originally produced in 1925 by the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Baptist Standard, a bi-monthly publication of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Both of these documents are endorsed by Downtown Baptist and are featured on its official website. In addition to this denominational literature, I also examined five documents produced by Downtown Baptist including the: (a) Constitution and Bylaws (adopted in 1986), (b) Church Profile (updated in 2005), (c) itemized budget for the 2009-2010 fiscal year, (d) Committee and Ministry Team Structure and Guidelines (adopted in 2008), and (e) Child and Youth Protection Policy (updated in 2006).

Methods of Analysis

I engaged in two types of analysis, an ethnographic discursive analysis of the meeting interactions and a narrative analysis derived largely from the interview data. Before articulating my rationale for this two-part analysis, though, I first address the relationship between discourse and narrative analysis since the meaning of these terms has often “multiplied, merged and demerged, overlapped and fragmented” (Gabriel, 2004, p. 63). I resonate with Gubrium and Holstein (1999) who view ethnographic [discursive] and narrative studies as existing along a complex but complimentary border. They describe the distinction and relationship between them as:

Narrative analysis refers loosely to the examination of the diverse stories, commentaries, and the conversations engaged in everyday life. Ethnography points broadly to the careful and usually long-term observation of a group of people to reveal the patterns of social life that are locally experienced... . In the

practice of fieldwork [then], there is considerable overlap between narrative and ethnography. (p. 561)

In line with their viewpoint, I contend that these forms of analysis can productively exist in a “representational *interplay*, as analytic urgencies that constantly keep one another in check” (pp. 564-565, emphasis in original). Though there is confusion among these terms and their application in qualitative studies, there are notable distinctions that, when paired in tandem, can form a rich and meaningful analysis. When applied to a case study such as this, they bolster the quality of the case study and its potential contribution to the scholarly literature; further discussion of how each analysis bolstered the contribution of this case study is discussed in a subsequent section (Analytical Rigor).

Nonetheless, even the most skilled qualitative researcher would likely admit that analyzing one’s data is in general the “most difficult and least codified part of the process” of research (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 539). Like Janesick (2000), I believe that good qualitative research does not succumb to “methodolatry...a slavish attachment to method” which comes at the expense of emerging insight and understanding (p. 390). However, a good qualitative researcher still thoroughly describes and defends her methodological and analytical choices. As such, I articulate the choices and procedures employed for each form of analysis in the remainder of this section.

Discursive Analysis

Discourse analysis is broadly defined by Putnam and Fairhurst (2001) as “the study of words and signifiers, including the form or structure of these words, the use of language in context, and the meanings or interpretations of discursive practices” (p. 79). More specifically, I took an *ethnography of communication* approach to studying the

discourse of Downtown Baptist meetings (Hymes, 1964; see also Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Lindlof & B. C. Taylor, 2002). Ethnography of communication or EOC is an analytical approach that treats communication as a “situated and practical event whose understanding requires ethnographic investigation” (Lindlof & B. C. Taylor, 2002, p. 45). The EOC approach aligns with a constitutive ontology in that it views “discourse and social meaning [as] intertwine[ing] with immediate context to *constitute* the process of organizing and the nature of speech communities” (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001, p. 92, emphasis added).

In keeping with Hymes’ (1964) aims, the goal of this discursive analysis is to “generalize the particularities, but also particularize the generalities” of how discourse shapes and is shaped by organizing processes in Downtown Baptist meetings (p. 11). In other words, my aim was to provide a rich description of the interaction but also extract some greater meaning from the data that might be relevant to other organizational contexts. In focusing on the communication event of meetings, my analysis attempted to identify *speech codes* that guided meeting interactions; also called *communication codes*, speech codes are defined as “system[s] of symbols, meanings, and beliefs and normative rules about communication” shared among a group or organization (Baxter, 1993, p. 314; see also, Philipsen, 1992).

Toward this end, I engaged in two distinct phases of coding and analysis. In the first phase of analysis, I coded my field notes and transcriptions of the audio-taped meetings using Hymes’ (1964) acronym of SPEAKING, a heuristic tool that encourages the researcher to attune to the following discursive elements: *Setting* (time, place, physical context); *Participants* (actors involved in the interaction); *Ends* (goals, purposes,

and outcomes of the interaction); *Act* (form and order of the interaction); *Key* (the tone, manner, or spirit of the interaction); *Instrumentalities* (the channel and style of speaking); *Norms* (social rules and standards that govern the interaction); and *Genres* (e.g., public address, narrative) (see Bauman & Sherzer, 1975 for further discussion). I used two data management tools in NVivo8 to organize these elements: (a) “nodes” were used to store codes that represented the qualitative elements of interaction (e.g., the various spirits of the meeting interactions) and (b) “attributes” were used to record characteristics of the participants (e.g., member type) and meetings in general (e.g., meeting type).

As Philipsen (1992) points out, though, this is only a heuristic that is intended to help guide the analysis. Thus, I engaged in a second round of coding, utilizing a process of analytic induction to identify central patterns and relationships within and across coding categories (Bulmer, 1979; see also, Baxter, 1993). Bulmer’s first step in analytical induction, assessing which phenomena are more relevant to the analysis, was largely accomplished with Hymes’ aforementioned heuristic guide. Following this, I engaged in the remaining three activities of analytical induction that Bulmer describes: (a) focusing on codes that are most prominent, (b) accounting for exceptions and contradictions to these codes, and (c) synthesizing the codes into a coherent presentation of the findings.

To accomplish the first activity, I used the “coding density” tool in NVivo8 to identify which codes were most prevalent in the data set. The most prominent codes were then compared to ensure that they were exhaustive and mutually exclusive. The second activity essentially involved a subsequent process of negative case analysis wherein the remaining codes were either reinforced or reexamined for their appropriate fit. In the latter case, these codes were refined, elaborated on, or eliminated from the emerging

analysis. Finally, I examined the remaining codes and categories for relationships between them, eventually organizing them into three communication codes (i.e., discourses) and four principles of code use that will be described in the next chapter. Throughout the entire process, I took several measures to ensure the credibility of the analysis. Before describing these measures, though, I first outline the steps taken in the narrative analysis.

Narrative Analysis

In an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the communicative organization of Downtown Baptist, I examined the interview data from an approach that views narrative as constitutive of the social world (Pentland, 1999). This analysis supplements the ethnographic, discursive analysis by “permit[ting] the identification of plurivocal native interpretations in a way that assists us in reading polysemy back into ethnographic research” (Brown, 1998, p. 36; see also Boje, 1995). Put differently, this analysis incorporates multiple participant voices into the analysis in a way that is not fully accomplished in ethnography of communication. This stage of the analysis helped to answer pertinent questions including: How do members act in accordance (or discordance) with their communicative experiences? How do members make sense of these experiences? And, how do members’ values affect their decision-making processes and actions? (Fisher, 1987). In sum, this approach to inquiry helped further explain and interpret what Pentland (1999) refers to as the surface structure of the data (i.e., the insights provided in the EOC analysis).

Before describing the procedures that guided this stage of the analysis, it is first necessary to clarify what I mean by the term *narrative*. I align with scholars who define

narrative more broadly as “a basic trait of all forms of cognitive processing and social information” rather than as episodic, isolated stories (J. R. Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 41; see also Bruner, 1991; Greimas, 1987; Pentland, 1999; Reissman, 1993). As such, I approach narrative inquiry as the process of analyzing the narrative properties that “any set of data (in whatever form) might have in varying degrees” (Pentland, 1999, p. 712). Specifically, I examined the interview data for the following narrative properties: *sequence, values and character, actors, voice, context, and genre*. *Sequence*, or the unfolding of action over time from beginning to end, is revered as one of the most fundamental elements of narrative (Pentland, 1999; Ricoeur, 1980; 1984; J. R. Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Thus, I first examined the interview transcripts for members’ varying conceptions of sequence and temporality (e.g., a nostalgic versus a future-oriented view of DB).

Next, I examined the transcripts for what Fisher (1987) contends is the most central aspect of narrative, the *character* or *morality* of the actors. This phase of the analysis also involved concurrent examination of the *actors* and *values* featured in the narratives. Specifically, I compared participants’ characterizations of other members in the organization, examining them for points of similarity and difference (e.g, various participants’ views on Pastor Matthew’s attitude toward congregationlist governance). This step was taken in an effort to examine whether characters are perceived as “behav[ing] characteristically” (Fisher, 1987, p. 16). Because perceptions of character are largely informed by cultural values, I then examined participants with similar character judgments in groups to uncover common assumptions and values. For example, I divided participants who viewed Pastor Matthew’s faith-centered discourse as authentic and

powerful into a separate group from participants who perceived this discourse as lacking sensibility and realism. Subsequently, I examined each group's transcripts for explicit and subtle values shared within each group.

Along with this practice, I also examined each participant's *voice*, the subjective perspective or point of view that colors one's perceptions of reality (Pentland, 1999). Voice was examined through close attention to participants' language use, particularly in attributions of their own agency as well as the agency of others. This process facilitated my understanding of whose voices are alternately privileged and silenced in communicative interactions, an aspect of social reality that significantly influences the organizing process (Brown, 1998; Pentland, 1999). For example, Pastor Matthew's use of the phrase "Tier One" to refer to a particular group within the pastoral staff (administrative pastor, music minister, education minister, and himself) suggests a degree of authority afforded to these pastors that is not necessarily imbued on others.

Finally, I examined the transcripts for narrative properties of *context* and *genre*. Context refers to participants' descriptions of the setting and time period. For example, some of the participants viewed organizational issues with urgency while others held a more relaxed or even dismissive perspective. Likewise, participants spoke in different ways about the general position of church (e.g., entering a new era; losing its heritage; in a period of transition). The final property analyzed was genre, the particular types of stories told by the participants (J. R. Taylor & Van Every, 2000). This use of the term genre is narrower than Hymes' (1964) conceptualization, who viewed narrative itself as a particular type of genre. In analyzing genre I examined the transcripts for recognizable, generic features such as confessions, fantasies, war-stories, and parodies, to name a few.

After examining the narrative properties of the interviews, I recognized significant divisions among participants' responses. Similar to Brown's (1998) realization while studying technology implementation in an organization, I found that "groups were telling very different type of stories and their retrospective descriptions and explanations seemed designed to do more than structure just their own sensemaking of events" (p. 40). I discovered four distinct narrative realities that inevitably play a role in the communicative constitution of the church. Thus, I focalized these experiences into four self-constructed narratives that "draw attention to the inherent storylike character of fieldwork accounts" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 8). As this artful process admittedly integrated my voice into the creation and ascription of meaning, it is important that I exercised authorial reflexivity in order to ensure a plausible and credible account of the findings (Brown, 1998). That is, this approach to writing requires that I carefully examined and accounted "for whom" I am speaking (see Fine et al., 2003). The next section describes how I demonstrated analytical rigor throughout the research process.

Analytical Rigor

Engaging in two analyses that "keep one another in check" was the initial step toward ensuring the case study's credibility (Gubrium & Holstein, 1999, p. 565). Specifically, the interplay between the ethnographic and interview data in this case study facilitated a meaningful analysis of the relationship between how organizational members viewed themselves versus how they actually behaved in an organizational setting; put differently, this two-pronged analytical approach enabled me to advance defensible claims regarding the relationship between participants' "walk" (i.e., their actual discursive practices) versus their "talk" (i.e., their feelings and interpretations of the

practices they engage in). This, however, is not a sufficient condition to demonstrate evidence of a committed study (B. C. Taylor & Trujillo, 2001). Thus, I took additional measures to promote the integrity of each analysis. Before discussing the unique measures employed within each type of analysis, though, I first describe the overall steps I took to advance a trustworthy and meaningful analysis.

As Johnson (1999) contends, trustworthiness in research is the notion that the researcher's interpretations are evocative of the reality of what was studied. I promoted a trustworthy interpretation, in part, by utilizing informant interviews to (a) test my understanding of the "universe of discourse" that constitutes Downtown Baptist meetings (Philipsen, 1992), and (b) help me understand members' discursive constructions of and responses to various organizational decisions. Saturation of the data and precise descriptions of my methods also advanced the trustworthiness of the study.

In addition to trustworthiness, I attempted to foster a meaningful analysis through extensive within- and cross-case comparison of the data. During this process, I was sensitive to nuances among the data, being careful not to take for granted that there may be multiple speech communities within a single organizational context (Baxter, 1993). This process was facilitated by using the qualitative software program NVivo8 to manage, explore, and work with the data. By conducting "queries" of the data to compare different dimensions (e.g., participants with different roles; meetings with different functions), I was able to look at the data in many contrasting ways (Eisenhardt, 1989). For example, I selected categories/dimensions from the analysis (e.g., faith) and looked for consistencies within groups (e.g., ministerial staff vs. committee members) as well as

distinctions between groups. I also divided and compared the data by source (e.g, interviews versus field notes) which revealed many differences.

In addition to these overall measures, I engaged in two activities specifically designed to enhance the credibility of the ethnographic discourse analysis. Since description is the foremost concern in EOC (Hymes, 1964), I was chiefly concerned with meeting the standards of *descriptive validity*, the evaluative dimension of qualitative research that attempts to answer the question, “Did this happen?” (Johnson, 1999). I achieved this by gathering sufficient data and engaging in source triangulation (see Adler & Adler, 1998; Lindlof & B. C. Taylor, 2002; B. C. Taylor & Trujillo, 2001). For example, I incorporated organizational documents to inform my understanding of meeting interactions, and I compared the observation and interview data to reinforce my understanding of participants’ discursive actions in meetings. In addition to descriptive validity, though, EOC also involves judgments concerning the “life” of the participants, the conditions under which speech occurs, and what meanings the speech holds for the members. Thus, I also conducted member checks during my semi-structured interviews in an effort to achieve *interpretive validity* (Johnson, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; B. C. Taylor & Trujillo, 2001).

Because I used an authorial strategy in the narrative analysis which positioned me as the spokesperson for the participants, my goal was not to demonstrate validity in the second form of analysis. Conversely, I also did not want to succumb to the temptation in narrative analysis to, “exceed the prerogatives of poetic license and venture into the field of misrepresentation” (Gabriel, 2004, p. 68). Thus, I was chiefly concerned with the criterion of *crystallization*, the act of credibly defending that the judgments being made

are plausible and meaningfully derived from the data (Janesick, 2000; Richardson, 2000). In line with this effort, I reflexively examined the relationship between myself and my participants, being careful to present my own interpretation while still preserving the voice of the participants being represented (Altheide & Johnson, 1998; B. C. Taylor & Trujillo, 2001). This was achieved, in part, by explicitly acknowledging the role that I played as a research instrument who gathered information and insight alongside my participants (Cheney, 2000; Janesick, 2000; Punch, 1986).

In addition to this process of reflexivity and accountability, I was also conscious throughout my analysis and writing to strive for the narrative value of *verisimilitude*, “the subjective resonance that occurs between the listener’s/reader’s experience of the world and the narrator’s rendition of it” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001, p. 1000; see also, Bruner, 1991). This value was assessed when I shared portions of my results with several participants whom were represented in the narratives. As my listeners/readers, they affirmed the verisimilitude of the narratives I crafted which, as Tsoukas and Hatch (2001) contend, ultimately imparts credibility to the narrative.

Summary

In this chapter, I first attended to Marshall and Rossman’s (2006) call for qualitative researchers to demonstrate the “fit” between their research questions (see Chapters Two and Three) and methods (i.e., case study design). After defending the appropriateness of a case study approach, I presented additional information about the research setting and corpus of data included in the analysis. Next, I described the combination of ethnographic and discursive methods used to examine Downtown Baptist’s formal meetings. This description demonstrated how I sought to “engage nested

moments of discursive action... . [and] uncover the ways in which these discursive practices accomplish (or not) organizing phenomena” (Broadfoot et al., 2004, p. 199). Then, I outlined the methods that guided the narrative analysis and discussed the steps taken throughout both analyses to ensure a committed study. The following chapter presents the results of the first analysis, the ethnographic and discursive examination of interaction in Downtown Baptist meetings.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCURSIVE DIMENSIONS OF DOWNTOWN BAPTIST MEETINGS

“Let me just share with you before you go into slash and cut and burn mode. I think God is refining us. He’s pruning us. What we’re dealing with now is...really, an area of disobedience. God is not blessing this area. I’m not working against anyone, but I’m working on the side of giving...I know I can’t do it on my own. But God through me...he [Administrative Pastor] deals with reality - black and white - and I’m not working against him but with him.”

Pastor Matthew at a committee meeting about church Finances

Pastor Matthew’s words offer a consummate glimpse into the discourse community that constructs Downtown Baptist meetings. His quotation demonstrates a predominate pattern of speaking as it also alludes to the presence of other patterns which intermittently create tension within the community. In this chapter, I answer the first two sets of research questions, in part, by illuminating the communication codes that govern Downtown Baptist meetings (RQ1a), identifying how these codes intermingle in this setting (RQ1b), and analyzing how these codes are perceivably interpreted by meeting participants and to what ends (RQ2a/b). The first part of this chapter focuses on the descriptive aspects of ethnography of communication as I discuss the overall discourse community of Downtown Baptist and describe three communication codes that sustain the community’s interaction in meetings. The second part of this chapter turns toward the interpretive aspect of ethnography of communication as I examine the community’s assumptions about the accepted use, interpretation, and significance of these codes.

The Discourse Community

A *discourse (or speech) community* is defined as a group of people who share common assumptions about the accepted use, interpretation, and significance of verbal and nonverbal communication in a certain situation and setting (Philipsen, 1992). Early work in ethnography of communication typically analyzed one coherent discourse community, but more recent scholarship has drawn attention to the idea that multiple discourse communities may exist within a single organizational context (e.g., Baxter, 1993; Castor, 2007; Palmeri, 2004). Thus, when I began observing Downtown Baptist meetings I was sensitive to the potential for this plurivocality, particularly because the roles and backgrounds of participants in these meetings ranged broadly from full-time pastors to volunteer committee members. And as Palmeri (2004) contended in his study of collaboration among attorneys, medical professionals, and writers, distinctive roles and backgrounds may signify multiple communities who possess different assumptions about the meaning of communication.

Ultimately, though, I identified only one discourse community, albeit a diverse one with several distinct *communication (or speech) codes*. Philipsen (1992) defines a speech code as a system of symbols, meaning, and norms regarding communication, and previous scholars (e.g., Baxter, 1993) have advanced the notion that different codes in a single organizational context are often emblematic of distinct discourse communities. As such, I debated whether there were several communities with their own individual codes or one coherent community that shared several patterns of communication. I concluded the latter for the following reason. While other scholars found that distinct communities experienced problems in understanding and acknowledge other communities' codes, the

participants in Downtown Baptist meetings appeared to generally comprehend, accept, and even intermittently alter their use of codes depending upon the setting. That is, they shared unifying assumptions about the codes' accepted uses and meanings. I am not suggesting, however, that conflict and problems did not arise; these issues were indeed present and will be discussed later in this chapter. Rather, I contend that these issues did not arise because there were two or more distinct groups of people who failed to understand and/or accept each other's competing patterns of discourse. The communication codes that governed interaction in Downtown Baptist meeting were shared and/or recognized by the majority of the participants, albeit these codes occasionally acted in tension with one another. The remainder of this section describes each of these codes and their manifestation and treatment by participants in various meeting settings.

Communication Codes of Ethereal and Material Logics

The ethnographer of communication strives to produce what Van Maanen (1988) refers to as a realist tale, a naturalistic portrait of the object of study. Toward this end, I employed the cultural language of Downtown Baptist to designate names for the three communication codes and their according sub-dimensions. I refer to these codes as (a) *keep the faith*, (b) *secular thinking*, and (c) *business as usual* which together reflect the ethereal and material logics that govern the interaction in Downtown Baptist meetings (RQ1a). While distinct, these codes are not mutually exclusive, nor are they employed perpetually by specific members or during particular types of meetings. Rather, they were enacted in varying degrees among all of the meetings I observed. In this section, I first

describe each code and the dimensions that comprise it, and then I discuss how these codes intermingled in meeting interactions.

Keep the Faith

“We can make it through this. I just keep thinking on the verse in Matthew, ‘with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’ We’ve just got to keep the faith.”

Pastor Peter at a staff meeting on church Finances

A communication code about faithfulness may appear to be ubiquitous or even somewhat trite for a church organization. Nonetheless, faith-centered patterns of speaking were an authentic element of the discourse community, but unlike sporadic lip service to faith, members who share this code emphasized faith-centered values as a basis for organizational decision-making and action. Faith was elevated to the forefront of meeting activities and discussions rather than serving as just a peripheral element that appeared in closing prayers or occasional comments. While it was most prominently used in staff and deacon meetings, *keep the faith* was present in lesser degrees at other meeting settings, as well.

The two dimensions that comprise this code are illustrated with the following interaction from a deacon meeting where Pastor Matthew reported on the church’s bleak finances. In response to a question about how the deacons could help to assuage the situation, the pastor said, “My personal plan is to pray, to sacrifice...to lead this church by example...and I am asking you as the pastoral body of the church to come alongside of me and pray.” As Pastor Matthew spoke, the deacons nodded their heads and a few of them even whispered silent “amens.” Then, the deacon chair, Charles, invited everyone to pray with him “for God’s sovereignty over the church’s financial health.” The two

dimensions of *keep the faith* illustrated here are (a) integration of spiritual disciplines (e.g., prayer, scripture reading) into regular meeting activities, and (b) dialogic communication that venerates faith-centered thought. I refer to these dimensions respectively as *ora et labora* and *spirit-filled dialogue* and elaborate on each of them in turn.

Ora et labora. Pastor Matthew closed the first pastoral staff meeting of the new year with the mantra “ora et labora,” meaning “pray and work.” He explained that this was his New Year’s resolution, to be more intentional about prayer and the role that it and other spiritual disciplines (e.g., Bible study) have in making “transparent” and “integrity-filled” decisions for the church. He also challenged the pastoral staff to more consciously incorporate spiritual disciplines into their work activities and meetings. Pastor Matthew’s words epitomize a central dimension of *keep the faith*, using spiritual disciplines as a basis for organizational decision-making and action.

Pastor Tricia and the children’s ministry support staff modeled this communication code with the use of devotionals to open meetings and, as Pastor Tricia said, “gear people up for making wise decisions.” Devotional topics on the elusiveness of “Christian perfection” and the need to “get alone with God” were discussed among the staff and referenced later during the meeting. Likewise, the staff members also shared prayer requests and prayed extensively for these, a practice that was also featured in several pastoral staff and deacon meetings. My most memorable experience with this communication code came during an education staff meeting when the Minister of Education asked me not only to share my own prayer requests but to pray aloud for the concerns of another member of the education staff. This situation caused a considerable

amount of trepidation for me as an observer as participant (Adler & Adler, 1998) yet it appeared to be a natural request for the pastor.

Spirit-filled dialogue. In addition to the integration of spiritual disciplines, users of the *keep the faith* code also engaged in communication that normalized the role that God plays in influencing organizational decisions and member actions. This was a shared dialogue (albeit, nonverbal at times) among multiple meeting participants, rather than the monologic words of a single interlocutor. Members reinforced the importance of faith by offering verbal and/or nonverbal confirmations of the spirit-filled language. For example, when Pastor Austin talked about “letting the Spirit move” and listening to “what God told you” regarding the college ministry programs and worship, his support staff would readily respond with views of how divine forces influenced their opinions. In the same vein, some of them would defer judgment, asking whether “this is something I can pray about and let you know my thoughts later.” Likewise, staff members later affirmed Pastor Austin’s inspiration for a proposed program as coming from a “vision” he encountered in a dream.

Spirit-filled dialogue also functioned as a rationale for organizational actions, such as Pastor Tricia’s “conviction”⁴ that she needed to train her workers better and Pastor Joe’s patience in locating a new ministry leader because he “can’t speak for what the Lord’s going to do for that specific person.” In the latter case, other pastors affirmed Joe’s decision to wait on this position and agreed to make it a “matter of prayer and thought” for themselves, as well. *Spirit-filled dialogue* was not only used by staff members; committee members and deacons engaged in this manner of communication, as

⁴ Several participants use the term “conviction” or “convicted” to convey a spiritually-derived compulsion or belief regarding their actions and/or attitudes. Subsequent portions of this chapter also feature this term.

well. For example, in a conversation about where to cut expenses, a Personnel Committee member asked whether there was a group of members who could more broadly “discern God’s will for the mission of the church.” Other committee members immediately echoed this member’s question, admitting that they didn’t know where and toward whom the church was “called [by God] to serve most.”

In addition to serving as a rationale for decisions, *spirit-filled dialogue* was also used to explain circumstances faced by the church. This is most clearly demonstrated in Pastor Matthew’s account of why the church was encountering financial difficulties and the subsequent pastoral staff responses to this explanation. After declaring that the current situation was a result of “spiritual disobedience” on the part of church congregants, he said, “This throws a new dynamic into my prayer life that I haven’t had in a long time. We [staff] are not going to increase the revenue of the church...God, through the hearts and minds of people, will do that.” In response, Pastor Joe referenced Psalm 50, saying, “God who owns all the cattle, gold, and silver is sovereign and will provide.”

Not all of this dialogue carried a serious tone, though. Perhaps the most telling demonstration of *spirit-filled dialogue* as a communication norm was when it was humorously incorporated into conversations. That is, many of the same members who revered prayer and Bible study in staff meetings also embraced jokes concerning God’s authority and agency in church matters. For example, when a children’s ministry staff member mentioned that he may be out of town for an upcoming event, Pastor Tricia joked, “Oh, Danny, didn’t I tell you? God told me that He doesn’t want you to take vacation that week.” This comment spurred laughter across the entire group and the

following repartee from Danny, “Oh yeah? Well, God told me that He changed His mind. So, guess it looks like it’s God’s will for me to get out of town!” This banter was less apparent, though, in other meetings with the *keep the faith* pattern of speaking. With the exception of one deacon meeting when a microphone boomed and the deacon chair joked, “Yes, God?”, no other non-staff meetings featured this humorous element. In its stead was often a code I refer to as *secular thinking* and describe in turn.

Secular Thinking

“I know it’s that icky place we don’t like to go sometimes, but let’s face it – we’ve got to have a little bit of secular thinking or we’ll end up in jail or out on the streets!”

Children’s staff member talking about daycare policies

As this quote suggests, not all of the communication in staff meetings demonstrated a commitment to *keep the faith*. The second code shared by members of this discourse community reflects a value in modes of thought that consider the practices of governmental agencies and other “secular” organizations (i.e., businesses or non-profit organizations that are not expressly faith-based). This code was more broadly applied across a variety of meeting settings, and it was used by pastors, other staff members, and lay leaders alike. One of the most vivid depictions of this code came during a Personnel Committee meeting as members attempted to generate alternatives to cutting the church staff payroll. During the conversation, a female committee member interjected:

My question for us as a church is: Do we have other non-profits that we are working with? I mean, we have so many internships with university students who find ways to get paid through grants, etc., and get their coursework done by working with us. I’m not suggesting government money, but I am...thinking

about how we can benefit from this. I mean, there's a ministry part – where we may receive cash, etc., from organizations that are benefiting from *us*. Do *they* get a kickback?...I know that sounds horrible, but it just seems that there's a lot of secular folks that receive this and the minister types get taken.

This committee member's words reflect one of the three dimensions that comprise this communication code. Her focus on *worldly concerns* was shared by other committee members who were also interested in how the church might tap into additional financial resources. Another dimension of this code is the desire of members to establish *tangible measures and strict application* of those measures in setting church goals and bases for decision-making and action. Before discussing these interrelated dimensions, I first describe a foundational dimension of *secular thinking*, the almost unconscious use of *corporate lingo* during meeting interactions.

Corporate lingo. I was first exposed to the business-like language that effuses many meeting conversations when I observed the pastoral staff discuss “prospects.” Thoughts of job prospects and market prospects came to mind as pastors exchanged comments including, “Alright, anyone have any good prospects this week?”, “Is she a legitimate prospect?”, and “I don't know if I'd quite categorize her as a prospect.” After the meeting I asked the youth pastor what “prospect” meant, and he replied, “Oh, you know – a person that might join the church. Huh, guess that is kind of a funny word...kind of sounds like some sort of corporate lingo or something.” As Pastor Chris's reply suggests, this dimension of *secular thinking* is one that the pastors and staff do not consciously incorporate into their speaking. It is a habitual manner of word choice and phrasing that connotes a corporate or business-like environment.

This language crept into the conversations of pastors and lay leaders alike, although committee members and administrative staff members (e.g., Pastor Peter) applied it more consistently. For example, in his committee report at the November church business meeting Finance Chair Nelson shared the “hard numbers” on the financial situation:

Giving looks just like last year. The problem is we began the year in negative cash flow. If things don’t turn around, we cannot maintain this position. The negative cash on hand has been a fiscal trend for several years. We are in deficit spending, and the longer we do that the more our cash reserves fall farther behind.

Phrases such as “fiscal trend” and “deficit spending” evoke an atmosphere of corporate accounting rather than church tithing, revealing the interlocuter’s tendency toward *secular thinking*. Committee members demonstrated this, as well. For example, Personnel Chair Jeff often talked about “strategically aligning the church’s core competencies,” and Finance Committee member Butch argued that more staff members needed to be “issued memos” about “unsanctioned spending.” These patterns of speaking presumably follow from Nelson’s profession as an accountant and the legal profession shared by the latter two participants. However, as the “prospect” example demonstrates, even pastors participated in this code, sporadically using terms including “contingency plan,” “liaison,” and the need to develop “job descriptions” for ministry volunteers. These phrases were often incorporated into broader conversations about a variety of *worldly concerns* that are discussed in turn.

Worldly concerns. Though no member of the discourse community used this specific phrase, members often talked about the difference between “worldly” or

“secular” values versus “Christian” values. Thus, I use the phrase *worldly concerns* to encompass member communication that centered on a number of topics such as governmental and legal issues. Concerns toward these “worldly” issues are exemplified in the following conversations about (a) childcare policies and (b) information privacy on the church website. First, in a setting that was also prominently characterized by *spirit-filled dialogue*, the issue of childcare policies was thoroughly discussed at a Children’s Committee meeting. Attendees deliberated about whether spouses should be permitted to be the only caregivers assigned to a particular room, and at one point Pastor Tricia turned to a member with a background in human resources and asked, “What do you think? Would this kill us?” The concern stemmed from the fact that spouses cannot be compelled to testify against one another in the event that allegations of child abuse are brought forth.

In a similar vein, the issue of information privacy was contested during a Finance Committee meeting when Pastor Peter announced that members may now access each other’s contact information (e.g., addresses, phone numbers) through the church’s new online directory. Several committee members immediately began to ask questions about confidentiality and rights to privacy. Even though Peter attempted to assuage these concerns, some members were not satisfied. One member even said, “Hey, I know that we’re kind of blowing this up, but this is just the lawyer in me thinking right now.” Another related *worldly concern* that the community valued was safeguarding the church against vandalism and keeping members from physical threat or harm. To illustrate, the pastoral staff held a lengthy discussion about whether a local non-profit should be allowed to cater weekly meals at the church for homeless individuals. Rather than

adopting a *keep the faith* code of divine authority and protection, the pastors talked about how they could humanly control the situation by “possibly having security” or “locking doors so that people can’t travel all over the building.”

In a slightly different vein, *worldly concerns* also encompass the community’s attention toward marketing and recruitment efforts. This dimension of *secular thinking* involved discussions about marketing as a means to attract membership and stand out within the community. This code also manifested itself during Leadership Enlistment Committee discussions about who to nominate for church leadership positions. For example, when the committee considered who to nominate for the leader of the international ministry, they emphasized the need to get a native English speaker with “no discernable dialect.” The committee’s staff advisor, Pastor Joe, explained this strategic choice with, “Yeah, they’ve got to talk plain, non-southern English. If not, some people can’t understand him or her, and we end up losing people from the program. I’m telling you, this is the key to getting more people involved.”

Together, these concerns toward (a) governmental and legal issues and (b) marketing and recruitment efforts evoke a “secular” mentality that considers factors outside the scope of the church. And as the aforementioned examples demonstrate, this was a communication norm that was shared by multiple members across multiple settings. In line with these *worldly concerns* is the final dimension of the *secular thinking* code, an emphasis on *tangible measures* as a guide for church decision-making.

Tangible measures and strict application. In contrast to the abstract value of faith, members’ communication patterns also revealed a predilection for explicit, tangible standards for appropriate member action and overall organizational success. Appropriate

action is defined in member discourse as (a) controlling what you can see and (b) following rules and policies. The first aspect of this definition emphasizes what some referred to as “common sense” ways to handle church issues. Perhaps the most vivid depiction of this brand of *secular thinking* is demonstrated in the question and answer portion of a church business meeting which focused on the financial shortfalls. When the floor was opened up for questions, a member stated:

I don't really have a question, but I want to say something. For heaven's sake, we could start by turning off the lights, fixing that horrible running commode on the first floor, and dealing with – now Pastor Peter you know who I'm talking about – that custodian that isn't worth his wage. That guy needs to be fired!

In addition to this strategy of quick, controllable solutions, members also shaped the definition of appropriate action in terms of upholding or, as Pastor Tricia once said, “beefing up” organizational policies.

Pastoral staff and committee members mentioned several times that they needed to update the church's largest set of policies, its constitution and bylaws. The content of the bylaws themselves was not discussed often, though. One notable exception is when Pastor Peter asked the members of the Finance Committee whether it was “kosher” for Pastor Joe to purchase two parking lots that were not being used by the church. They debated whether there was anything in the bylaws that would bar him from doing so, but they concluded that the sale was acceptable.

Beyond the constitution and bylaws, members referenced other church rules and policies ranging from procedures for expenditures and reimbursement to standards for allowing non-members to serve on staff. The dynamic of these discussions is aptly

illustrated with the following excerpt from a staff debate about what types of announcement should be included in Sunday morning services:

Pastor Austin: What's the time frame? There should be a standard time frame that an announcement should be run for – I mean, if we announce an upcoming event for a couple of weeks that should be enough. Anything over that is getting a little out of hand.

Pastor Chris: I agree – I think people tune them out after awhile.

Pastor Matthew: Well, right now we have it so that only church-wide announcements should be allowed. Are we talking about expanding this rule?

Pastor Martin: Well, if we're going to do that, then let's do that. That's fine, but let's be consistent.

Media Dir. Howard: Then we need to define what "church-wide" means.

Pastor Matthew: Well, I don't think we have to get all dogmatic about it, but let's come to a consensus.

Pastor Matthew's comment begins to show the nuance among the communication codes that will be discussed in a subsequent section (A Community of Contrasting Codes).

In addition to defining appropriate actions, *tangible measures* were also used applied to the development and assessment of organizational goals. Pastor Joe even convened an entire education staff meeting for the purpose of "getting those [goals] down on paper." As he listened to each staff member share his or her goals for the upcoming year, he affirmed members who articulated clear, measurable goals (e.g., wanting to increase the number of churches that participate in a city-wide event) and redirected those that failed to clearly establish targets for success (e.g., Pastor Chris's goal of "getting to

know kids better”). Pastor Joe and other members of the discourse community also valued using other organizations as a benchmark for how Downtown Baptist is doing. This was illustrated in a Personnel Committee member’s question to Pastor Peter, “Is there data available on comparable churches so that we can see if [Downtown Baptist] is out of step with the norm?”

This question represents the words of many committee members throughout various meetings who spoke of how other churches were dealing with childcare, leadership positions, building maintenance, spending, and programs among other concerns. Pastor Joe also talked regularly about “what effective disciple-making churches are doing” with their Sunday school programs and ministries. In sum, users of the *secular thinking* code placed considerable value on explicit, measurable, and consistently enforced standards for Downtown Baptist decision-making and action. This pattern of communication was often fervent and forceful, a notable contrast to the final communication code that shapes meeting interactions.

Business as Usual

“Man, are you in for the thrill of your life. I can save you a lot of time by just giving you a copy of the meeting minutes. That will tell you just about everything you need to know.

And even that can be summed up in about three boring words: business as usual.”

Building and Grounds Committee member on my observer status

This response to my presence was not unlike many of the reactions I received when first attending a meeting. Users of the *business as usual* code viewed Downtown Baptist meetings as a predictable rather than dynamic setting that seldom required active engagement. Those who shared this code perpetuated consistency and often passively

engaged in dialogue and decision-making. This code was most often featured in church-wide business meetings and committee meetings, and it is comprised of three interrelated dimensions I refer to as (a) *order and adjourn*, (b) *going through the motions*, and (c) *paperwork*. This final code is related to the *secular thinking* code in that it upholds several of its dimensions. To illustrate, members who use the *business as usual* code often engage in *corporate lingo* and inadvertently champion *worldly concerns* through their focus on the staples of corporate meetings (e.g., agendas). *Business as usual* is distinct, though, in its degree of consciousness on the part of the interlocutor. That is, users of the *secular thinking* code are more often aware of their use of this code and its connotations, while users of the *business as usual* code are less focused on the implications of this pattern of speaking. I elaborate on this idea as I address the code's respective dimensions.

Order and adjourn. The first dimension of this code involves the way in which meetings were typically opened and closed. Unlike some meetings wherein thoughtful prayer and thematic scripture readings set the tone for interaction, meetings that featured a *business as usual* tone were quickly started and abruptly finished without any spiritual ado. The most often used phrase to begin meetings was "let's get started" although many meetings didn't feature any initiating remarks. Rather, the speaker simply began with the first order of business, often approving the previous meeting's minutes. This was consistently the case with church wide business meetings, which started immediately after the Sunday evening service without any opening prayer or introduction.

Likewise, there was often limited closure to Downtown Baptist meetings, particularly in ministry support staff meetings. For example, Pastor Tricia ended both of

the Children's Staff meetings abruptly with, "I'm done – are y'all through?" and "Okay, we're done." In the same vein, the Associate Minister of Recreation and Missions closed a recreation staff meeting with the courteous but generalized farewell, "Thank you for coming – have a good day." While *order and adjourn* was characteristic of certain types of meetings, it was not a staple in all these meetings. To illustrate, Pastor Matthew opened the pastoral staff meeting one week with a short devotional while in subsequent weeks it was promptly initiated by Pastor Peter with announcements and calendar updates. Members did not appear to be surprised by this inconsistent manner of opening and closing meetings, though.

Going through the motions. In line with *order and adjourn*, the overall business of Downtown Baptist meetings was often treated as a no-nonsense routine of mechanistic structures and interactions. This first became apparent after observing a church business meeting. As I made my way toward the door, I encountered a pastoral assistant I met the day before, and after exchanging greetings, I said, "Wow, that was pretty fast. Y'all don't mess around much during these meetings do you?" The assistant smiled and responded, "Nope, a bunch of these meetings are just a matter of going through the motions, you know."

This process of *going through the motions* was often facilitated by an informal application of Robert's Rules of Order, particularly in church business, deacon, and various committee meetings. In church business meetings it was applied strictly to govern meeting interaction, but it was more loosely integrated into committee and deacon meetings, often in the form of motions to approve business items and ensuring quorum before taking a vote. *Going through the motions* depicts the passive dimension of

business as usual, as it often reduced communication and interaction. To demonstrate, meetings that used this code typically presented the opportunity for meeting attendees to bring forth “new business.” However, on the eight occasions that I witnessed this invitation, no one ever responded to this call.

Paperwork. Finally, a ubiquitous addition to the *business as usual* pattern of communication was a variety of hardcopy materials that contained meeting agendas, copies of previous meeting minutes, and other information (e.g., financial summaries, brochures, worship and activity schedules). At times, these papers were provided but were not integrated into the meeting processes or mentioned once during meeting interactions. This was particularly characteristic of committee meetings wherein “bare bones” agendas were circulated but not followed. At other times, these papers provided unequivocal information and announcements that nearly eliminated the need for verbal meeting interaction. This was illustrated prior to a Youth Committee meeting wherein one member quietly commented to another, “Couldn’t we almost just have a paper meeting most of the time?” and the other member responded, “Yeah, just give us the paperwork so we can go about our business, right?”

This pattern of speaking represents a stark contrast to the *keep the faith* value of spirit-guided collaboration and the active engagement in *secular thinking*. Nonetheless, these codes collectively exist in a single discourse community. Table 5.1 provides a summary of these communication codes, followed by a discussion of how these distinct codes intermingle within Downtown Baptist meetings.

Table 5.1

Communication Codes in Downtown Baptist Meetings

Codes	Dimensions of the code	Description
Keep the faith	Ora et labora Spirit-filled dialogue	Emphasizes faith-centered values as a basis for organizational decision-making and action through prominent engagement prayer, Bible study, and spiritual dialogue.
Secular thinking	Corporate lingo Worldly concerns Tangible measures & strict application	Values modes of thought that privilege well-defined standards for organizational decision-making and action. Considers governmental agencies and other “secular” organizations (e.g., for-profit businesses).
Business as usual	Order and adjourn Going through the motions Paperwork	Positions DB meetings as a predictable rather than dynamic setting that seldom required active engagement. Users of this code perpetuate consistency by passively engaging in dialogue and decision-making.

A Community of Contrasting Codes

The discourse community that constitutes Downtown Baptist meetings is diverse in the sense that it enlists three distinct codes in communicative interaction, but it is uniform in that members share similar assumptions about the accepted use, interpretation, and significance of the three codes. In this section, I examine these assumptions by first describing the principles of code use accepted among the discourse community. In addition to recounting these discursive norms, I also discuss to what ends these norms operate for meeting participants (see Table 5.2 for an overview of this discussion).

Discursive Norms

This section proposes three overarching principles that govern members' uses of communication codes in Downtown Baptist meetings (RQ1b). These principles are summarized by the notions that (a) codes will inevitably intertwine, (b) different codes are more consistently used by certain members, and (c) different codes are more consistently used at different times. As I stated earlier in this chapter, all three codes surfaced in every type of meeting and every type of member. Nonetheless, there were patterns of code use across certain settings and member types that are elucidated in the following principles. The first principle is discussed individually while the second and third principles will be discussed in tandem.

Codes will inevitably intertwine. It is important to note that no member used a code exclusively and no meeting was comprised of a unitary pattern of code use. Rather, members of the discourse community intertwined the codes in three varying ways. I refer to these discursive norms as *code jumping*, *code compartmentalizing*, and *code trumping* and describe them in turn. *Code jumping* involves moving back and forth between two or more communication codes. This discursive action is accomplished by a single interlocutor throughout the course of a meeting or even within the course of a single set of statements. For example, multiple members would switch between *keep the faith* and *secular thinking* codes as is demonstrated in the following statement by Pastor Joe. Specifically, he moves between the *spirit-filled* and *tangible measures* dimensions of the respective codes as he talks about his desire to start a compulsory class for church membership:

Strong disciple-making churches are moving in this direction, and I definitely think it's scripturally guided. I had been waiting for our constitution and bylaws committee to require a class to join the church...but then I was convicted to go ahead and get this thing going. This is my expectation for 2010.

In this statement Pastor Joe references the tangible authority of rules and policies, but he also privileges faith in his references to being "scripturally guided" and "convicted."

Another example of this practice of code jumping is in Pastor Austin's discourse throughout an entire college staff meeting. He and his staff discussed the need to have time limits on testimonies, fire codes checked, and better systems of record-keeping (*secular thinking*), but they also talked about having a "spirit-led" format to their worship schedule (*keep the faith*). Such mixing of secular and faith-centered discourse was a staple in most of the pastoral and support staff meetings.

The second norm, *code compartmentalizing*, is usually initiated by a meeting facilitator, but it appears to be an accepted practice among meeting participants. This norm entails temporal separation of different communication codes throughout different phases of the meeting, and it was most consistently applied in the following manner: *keep the faith* would control the beginning and end of a meeting (e.g., an opening and closing prayer) while *business as usual* and/or *secular thinking* characterized the bulk of the meeting interaction. In essence, this practice is evocative of the notion of *ora et labora* except the "prayer" is isolated from the "work" of the meeting. Some members referred to this in hallway conversations as giving "lip service" to the "faith side of things." A slightly different application of *code compartmentalizing* is also demonstrated in the fact that deacons meetings were largely characterized by a *keep the faith* pattern of

communication, but the meeting itself was governed by Robert's Rules of Order, evoking the *going through the motions* dimension of *business as usual*.

The final practice of intertwining codes is the act of *code trumping*, an interactive process wherein one interlocutor responds by using a different code than the previous interlocutor employed. Often, this practice is only interactive for one round of conversational turn-taking. That is, the respondent's switch to a different code cuts off the conversation, and the original speaker does not reply. This manner of *code trumping* is demonstrated in the following excerpt from a Personnel Committee meeting:

Pastor Matthew: I know things are bad right now [with the Finances]. But I think God is pruning us, He's preparing us for something really special. We just have to show him that we can repent and be obedient in the area of giving again.

Personnel Chair Jeff: Well Pastor, it's just tough times...I don't know if we're necessarily being disciplined.

The room immediately quieted after this *keep the faith* code was trumped with *secular thinking*. Even Jeff averted his eyes from Pastor Matthew and became silent. After several seconds of silence, Pastor Peter changed the subject by moving on to the next item of meeting business. A similar situation transpired during a deacon meeting after Pastor Matthew offered a similar faith-centered message, and a deacon responded with the *tangible measures* statement, "Well, shouldn't we really be focusing on how we can cut our bills, you know, make some cutbacks?" The potential interpretations of this and the aforementioned discursive norms are discussed further in a subsequent section (see Consequences of Discursive Norms).

Different codes for different members and settings. The evidence provided earlier in this chapter to describe *keep the faith*, *secular thinking*, and *business as usual* foretold that different codes were more consistently applied to different members and settings. To elaborate further, I briefly address each member type and describe the nuances of their code use across different meeting settings. First, the members of the pastoral staff generally adopted a *keep the faith* pattern of communicating; however, they also adjusted their code use slightly to the type of meetings they attended. Specifically, the pastoral staff collaboratively exhibited more *secular thinking* in their weekly staff meetings. These regular meetings acted as a forum for the staff to talk candidly about church issues and the challenges they each faced in their respective areas of ministry. As such, they were often more logistical in their discussions and focused on more *worldly concerns* (e.g., member safety and building security).

The ministry support staff also generally aligned with the pastoral staff's pattern of code use. They adopted the code being used by their pastoral staff leader and switched fluidly as the pastor did. However, one segment of the support staff deviated from the rest. The recreation support staff under Pastor Martin exhibited a more *business as usual* approach to meetings with hasty openings and closing of meetings and passive orientation toward meeting interaction; this aligned with Pastor Martin's overall communication pattern throughout the majority of meetings he attended. Although I only observed one formal meeting of ministry support volunteers, these individuals also displayed a largely *business as usual* communication tone. This meeting appeared more informative in nature, and I was told by other staff that these types of meetings are

generally oriented more toward this informational vein (i.e., more announcements than collaborative dialogue and feedback).

The deacon meetings largely carried a *keep the faith* pattern of interaction, and most of the deacons exhibited these characteristics, as well. However, some of the deacons occasionally expressed a *secular thinking* response to issues brought before the group. Also, as mentioned previously, these meetings were also held in the *business as usual* style of Robert's Rules of Order. Perhaps the most heterogeneous group of members in the discourse community was the committee members. As an overall group they exhibited more consistently a *secular thought* approach to meeting objectives and discussions. However, individual committees and individual members varied in their prominent code use. The Finance, Personnel, and Leadership Enlistment Committees were the most beholden to the *secular thinking* code, while the Building and Grounds and Youth Committees exhibited a more *business as usual* orientation. The Missions Committee was difficult to discern because its chair, Philip, so prominently advocated a *keep the faith* manner of interaction; in fact, few of the committee members actually spoke during the meeting because Philip controlled most of the conversation. Finally, church business meetings were consistently regulated by a *business as usual* norm of interaction.

Thus, the overall discourse community combined communication codes as they engaged in *code jumping*, *code compartmentalizing*, and *code trumping* throughout each meeting. Additionally, certain communication norms distinguished varying member types and meeting occasions. In the following sub-section I discuss how these norms of code use may affect processes of organizing and member relationships.

Table 5.2

Discursive Norms among the Discourse Community and Potential Consequences

Principles of code use	Description of code use	Potential consequences
<u>Codes will be intertwined</u>		
Code jumping	Moving back and forth between two or more codes over the course of a meeting or within a single set of statements.	Members see all codes as central to organizational livelihood and values represented in codes are seen as potentially cooperative rather than oppositional
Code compartmentalizing	Temporal separation of communication codes throughout different phases of the meeting	While varying modes of thought may surface in meetings, they need not necessarily be fused together
Code trumping	One interlocutor responds with a different code than the previous interlocutor employed (typically confined to one round of turn-taking)	Conflict should be avoided, suppressed, or quickly assuaged
Code use varies according to individual members and settings		Certain modes of thought are more appropriate for certain types of members and meeting contexts

Consequences of Discursive Norms

In reference to *code jumping*, there are two potential consequences for member communication and organizing processes. The first potential consequence is that members come to understand that each code is central to the organization’s livelihood. By using multiple codes (and by extension multiple forms of reasoning) in meeting discussions, lay and staff members alike learn that the values represented in each code are necessary to furthering the multiple objectives in church organizing. This was evidenced in meeting interactions as members affirmed individuals who employed multiple codes when articulating their positions. I use the following discussion from a pastoral staff meeting to advance this idea:

Pastor Austin: Hey, I heard that a homeless person who came in to just get a cup of coffee was run off the other day. Is that true?

Pastor Peter: Hmm...it might have been Tasha. She can be really good and she can be really bad.

Pastor Austin: Well, I was kind of convicted about it. On the one hand I know we don't need to roam the halls, but I also think about the Bible passages about the "least of these."

Pastor Peter: Well, if there's fifty of them, then we have a problem, but it's not intrusive right now...

Pastor Joe: ...if we can scripturally be responsive to their needs, without being threatening to our congregation, then it's just fine. So, can we be intentional about that?

This dialogue and specifically Pastor Joe's comment demonstrates both *keep the faith* and *secular thinking* ideals. The staff affirmed this view and decided to follow his suggestion, thus, elevating this practice of alternating and combining modes of thought.

The second interrelated consequence of code jumping is that organizational members may perceive the values represented in each of the three codes (while varied) as complimentary and cooperative rather than oppositional or contradictory. Consider Pastor Matthew's depiction of the church's financial challenges. Essentially, he described the issue as "two sides of the same coin" wherein one side is "spending" and the other side is "giving." The sides of this metaphorical coin and the appropriate strategies for responding to the situation were respectively characterized using *secular thinking* and *keep the faith* patterns of discourse. Thus, members may view and treat these

communication codes as juxtaposed in partnership rather than competing in opposition. In a slightly different vein, *code compartmentalizing* perceivably teaches members that while all three of the communication codes are appropriate and necessary for Downtown Baptist organizing, they do not necessarily need to be fused together in dealing with all organizational issues. For example, the norm of beginning and ending meetings with spiritual disciplines (e.g., prayer) but turning toward a more *secular thinking* approach to central meeting objectives could be interpreted as faith is important but not necessarily central to accomplishing meeting objectives.

The norms associated with *code trumping* foster an altogether but equally important consequence for member communication and organizing. Considering that once a code has been trumped it is typically not challenged further, this may convey the idea that conflict is something to be avoided, suppressed, or quickly assuaged. Thus, it appears as though members would rather let a discordant issue pass to avoid engaging someone in further debate. In addition to avoiding conflict entirely, the practice of code trumping may also convey that members should suppress their own desires to engage in conflict and deny the attempts of others. This was demonstrated in earlier references to (a) the Personnel chair's comment to Pastor Matthew that "it's just tough times" (not a sign of spiritual disobedience) and (b) the business meeting participant's comment that "that guy needs to be fired." In the former scenario, Pastor Matthew refrained from responding to the chair, even though he could have; in the latter scenario Matthew assuaged the woman's exasperation by quickly assuring her that "those are things we can look into."

Finally, the pattern of nuance in code application across different individuals and settings suggests that certain codes are more appropriate for certain types of members and for certain meeting contexts. This perceived consequence was evident in the shift in atmosphere I witnessed when certain types of members arrived at various meetings. For example, one of the Finance Committee meetings began with a strong *secular thinking* pattern of interaction, but then it noticeably shifted toward a more *business as usual* and *keep the faith* manner of speaking when pastoral staff members arrived. Likewise, uncharacteristic codes for a particular setting also stood out in the meeting interaction. Consider the largely *business as usual* tone of recreation staff meetings and the *keep the faith* deference to Pastor Matthew in Personnel Committee meetings. These norms were respectively broken in each of these meetings when the Recreation Associate Pastor asked for prayer requests, and a Personnel Committee member expressed the *worldly concern* toward potentially getting money from outside sources. On both occasions, the speaker effectually apologized for adopting a non-characteristic communication code.

In sum, the various principles of code use shared by this discourse community potentially affect the organization and its members in the following ways. First, these norms acknowledge the necessary role that varied modes of reasoning play in Downtown Baptist organizing and convey the idea that the varied modes of reasoning (and values) may mutually reinforce rather than contradict one another. Second, the patterns of code use among the discourse community teach members that different codes (while all central to Downtown Baptist organizing), at times, should be isolated so that organizational objectives can be accomplished. Finally, these norms may effectually foster an

organizational culture wherein conflict is viewed as an undesirable form of interaction that is to be avoided, suppressed, or quickly assuaged

Summary

This chapter spoke to the first two sets of research questions by describing the communication codes that govern Downtown Baptist meetings and analyzing how these codes influence members' understanding of meeting processes. The communication codes of *keep the faith*, *secular thinking*, and *business as usual* were identified as the central patterns of communication that constitute a diverse but unifying discourse community. Next, I described how the discourse community collectively manages these codes by upholding the principles that (a) codes will inevitably intertwine, (b) different codes are more consistently used by certain members, and (c) different codes are more consistently used at different times. Finally, I discussed the ways in which these principles of code use perceivably affect member communication and organizing. This analysis represented an ethnography of communication approach to organizational inquiry and incorporated my observational data as the chief text for analysis. The following chapter features a narrative approach to analysis and offers an additional set of results to inform the case study findings.

CHAPTER SIX: NARRATIVES OF DOWNTOWN BAPTIST ORGANIZING

In this chapter, I offer a different perspective on the first two sets of research questions (RQs 1 and 2) by divulging four distinct narratives crafted from the participant interviews. These narratives represent the sundry ways in which members discursively shape and are shaped by Downtown Baptist organizing. In contrast to the previous chapter, the results of this analysis are portrayed in the spirit of a confessional tale wherein I liberally acknowledge my role in the analytical process and product (Van Maanen, 1988). In the following section, I illuminate the quality of this tale and explain how both the participants and I are interconnected in the narratives. Next, I present four narratives that are referred to as the *spiritual authority*, *congregationalist*, *rubber stamp*, and *separation narratives*. The chapter concludes with a brief epilogue in which I appraise each narrative and collectively synthesize them.

A Confessional Tale

Traditionally, a confessional tale is a supplement to the realist tale and offers a personal admission of how one's fieldwork influenced the culture and/or represented work (Van Maanen, 1988). This section demonstrates that traditional model by explaining the role that I played in crafting this chapter's content. However, the ensuing narratives that comprise this chapter are not prototypical confessional tales of my experiences as a researcher in the field; rather, they are participants' tales of Downtown Baptist organizing and are "narrated" by the participants themselves. I speak to these traditional and non-traditional aspects of the confessional tale in turn.

My own confession is that after analyzing the interview data according to the procedures outlined in Chapter Four (see Methodology), I exercised interpretive authority

by reflexively crafting my own narratives of the semi-structured interview data (Van Maanen, 1988; see also Geertz, 1973). The four narratives that follow are self-constructed, creative renderings of the various perspectives and values upheld by members of Downtown Baptist. Similar to previous scholars' approaches, "the construction of the narratives was not just a 'writing up', but an artful process" (Brown, 1998, p. 40; see also, Atkinson, 1990) of storytelling.

As with any confessional tale, my own positionality (explicated in Chapter One) informed the telling of these narratives. However, I also attempted to write in a way that conveyed a plausible and trustworthy account. Toward this end, I wove participants' own words from interviews into the unfolding narratives; these verbatim responses are featured in quotations or block quotes throughout each narrative. Alternatively, content that is featured outside of the quotes was not stated verbatim in the interviews. Nonetheless, the thoughts, emotions, and events conveyed in these crafted tales reflect those experienced by the participants. To illustrate, I offer an excerpt from the first narrative I crafted:

Pastors and even staff members admit that they are pretty strong-willed people who need the accountability that comes with our congregationalist structure. The most candid admission of this I've heard was from Pastor Donald's assistant who once said, "You start getting them [staff] all thinking the same way, and they could just bull over anything. So it [congregationalism] keeps accountability there, and that's really smart to keep the church going in the direction the *church* wants to go."

In the above excerpt, the words included in quotations represent a verbatim response offered by the music assistant during her semi-structured interview. Conversely, I (the researcher) crafted the remainder of the excerpt based on a collection of interviews and ethnographic observations. The “I” featured in the excerpt, however, was the creatively crafted voice of Tom, the former chair of the deacon fellowship; while Tom did not explicitly state any of these words in his interview, he plausibly endorses the ideas expressed in the constructed narrative.

Thus, the narratives are conveyed as first person explanations of organizational processes in Downtown Baptist. Each narrative represents a mini-confessional tale of members’ experiences with and orientations toward their organization. While some narratives are endorsed by certain groups more than others, none of the four narratives are authored exclusively by a particular member group (e.g., support staff). Likewise, no single member adopted only one narrative all the time. Rather, these narratives surface throughout the organization in varying degrees of public acknowledgement and estrangement.

The first two narratives of *congregationalism* and *spiritual authority* are more conventionally espoused and are voiced as candid declarations. These narratives are socially accepted throughout the organization and are endorsed in formal doctrines and organizational literature. The second pair of narratives, *rubber stamp* and *separation*, are less readily proclaimed and are authored in the tone of a hesitant, regretful, and, at times, secretive confession. As such, the latter set of authors are more generally identified (e.g., committee members) in contrast to the direct addresses of the former narratives. Together, these authors present a plot that begins with the previous pastor (Pastor Paul),

reminisces about changes in recent years (e.g., the move from a traditional to contemporary worship service), and ends with speculation about the church's financial health and evolving identity. As the chapter now shifts toward these narratives, it is important to note that the authorial voice shifts, as well, from "I" the researcher to "I" the various members who share their tales.

Spirit of the Law: The Congregationalist Narrative

Anyone will tell you that Pastor Paul was a wonderful shepherd. In fact, that was probably his greatest quality. But when Paul was here there was very little input from the congregation on, well, really anything. Even committees were more symbolic than true decision-making bodies. Howard, our media director, refers to that time as the "don't rock the boat years." But then, after Paul retired, we had two solid years where the church was almost *completely* committee run. I was on the Pastor Search Committee and another standing committee during that time, and while it was occasionally terrifying, I actually think it was really great for our church. It taught us what it's like to really live out the "the priesthood of believer", you know – to actually take responsibility for the life of the church.

Then Pastor Matthew came, and he appears to truly honor the congregationalist system upon which the Baptist faith was built. He champions the priesthood mentality in a way that committee members can now say, "God has given each of us a will to hear His spirit and define and discern what he's speaking to us individually. And as individuals become small groups [committees] then those small groups discern things, and they add to other groups." Working from that foundation, some amazing things have happened.

For example, last year we collectively decided that God was leading us to a ministry that required the largest budget in church history. I have a friend on the Finance Committee who came to me early on and said, “We’re going to do a faith-based zero budget – we can’t do that!” And I responded that we can if we work as a team and apply both business and faith principles. I reassured him, “It’s a business principle – but it requires faith. You take business principles, and you apply them with faith involved.” We came a long way with everyone involved. The staff did a presentation and had a dinner in the Fellowship Hall with about 250 people. They did a very nice job. Afterward I asked Pastor Matthew where they got the idea, and he said:

That’s what I thought a budget should be about. Because they [congregants] need to take part – if you’re a donor to this, then I would want to know where my money goes, what are we getting for our money, and is it going to where I want it to go?

At least from my understanding as the deacon chair at the time, the process was very thorough. The budget proposal went to committees, leaders, staff, and back to committees again. Some people may grumble and tell you, “Well, the committees don’t know what they’re doing or things aren’t clear,” but I would tell them exactly what our current deacon chair has said before: “The committees have been filled by prayerful and godly people, and they feel very responsible about doing a good job, attending, contributing - doing the best they can in their little human element.”

So making decisions around here isn’t just one person or group of people. It involves many people and many perspectives. Our Finance Chair, Nelson, paints a good picture of this when he describes his committee. He refers to Pastor Matthew as “the faith

part. And the Finance Committee – they’re the reality number – which is good. And then the pastor and the staff can come alongside us and say, ‘You’ve got to have some – there’s got to be some faith.’” It’s a give and take, and we even get into arguments. But ultimately, you always feel like you’re being heard even if you find yourself occasionally thinking, “oh man, what was he thinking?”

All in all, the lay leaders and support staff function as a kind of a focus group or test audience for staff ideas and opinions. More than this, though, our system creates what Pastor Matthew refers to as “levels of accountability” to ensure that godly decisions are made. Pastors and even staff members admit that they are pretty strong-willed people who need the accountability that comes with our congregationalist structure. The most candid admission of this I’ve heard was from Pastor Donald’s assistant who once said, “You start getting them [staff] all thinking the same way, and they could just bull over anything. So it [congregationalism] keeps accountability there, and that’s really smart to keep the church going in the direction the *church* wants to go.” Matthew has even acknowledged:

You wait and let God continue to speak, because a lot of time when God is speaking to people we think we’re hearing God, but we’re hearing more of ourself. And it’s up to committees, and staff, and whatever elders to make the ultimate decision of where God is leading us.

But to keep this democracy functioning it’s necessary to have some clear policies, rules, and set guidelines to push us along. That’s why we have a constitution and bylaws as well as other policies for committee structures, service, and so forth. Pastor Tricia’s assistant, Holly, has worked at the church for years and is very familiar with our church

bylaws, so I think she provides the best testament of why we have these guidelines. For example, she would say that the 3-year term limit on serving with one committee “helps us get a better view of how decisions fit the congregation. When we work with a committee that is frequently changing we get a lot more opinions than if we were in a model where the pastor dictates everything.” Our bylaws also give some clarity on when a decision needs to be put before an entire church vote. With so many decisions to be made, you can’t expect to put all of them to a full vote, but it’s good that decisions like the recent worship stuff are left to the entire congregation.

The most important thing to keep in mind about these rules, though, is that we can’t be dogmatic about them. Certainly, I agree with one of our lay leaders, Betsy, who insists, “The bylaws and rules are things that have *already* come through the discernment process so they help while we’re discerning the right thing [for the church]...they ensure our present discernment process is going well.” However, we also realize that these laws and rules may need to be changed over time. If we really feel like we should be going in a certain direction but the constitution is set in a certain way, we would naturally say, “So change the constitution, you know!”

To sum it up, we should abide by the spirit of the laws, not the letter. Even one of our most rule-oriented committee chairs, George, agrees with this. He uses the worship schedule change as an example of how we rightly followed the spirit of our constitution rather than dogmatically sticking to it throughout the process:

The staff started praying about it, and then we had to bring it to a vote...the bylaws said we just had to have a majority, but it wasn’t a very strong majority. So I remember Pastor Matthew discerning that we needed to think of something

else. So going with the bylaws we had a majority, but the staff discerned that maybe the majority was not enough - that we needed to think of other options - not letting the rules have the final say on the matter.

Treating the rules like this creates a healthy democratic process. Without this, our own structures would kill us, not to mention kill the Holy Spirit's influence on our decisions. Our experiences with other churches tell us this is true. For example, one of our new assistants, Violet, has mentioned that her previous church lost sight of what "God may be wanting them to actually be doing, because they're so focused on what's on the page rather than what the Holy Spirit's doing." She's a committed Baptist who grew up in a pastor's home, but even she sees that we've got to steer clear of dogma. The way she jokes about it really says it all:

Don't get me wrong. I love organization. Southern Baptists probably were created under a Type A personality like myself. I've got organization for my organization. I love it, but when it come to church work some of it's got to be free flowing, and you've got to be able to follow the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn't work in charts, you know.

So, yes, rules and policies are a big part of how we make decisions, but if we've "got to ask permission to breathe", it can certainly "choke the life out of us." In fact, a committee member who will remain nameless almost took us down this path recently. When we were working through potential solutions for our financial situation, he got so obsessed with making decisions by the letter of the law that he stirred up a lot of division. He had committees pitted against committees and pastors trying to do damage control; it was an absolute mess.

So, if you had to sum up the way we do things today, most people would tell you that it's a well structured collaboration among the pastors, staff, committees, and lay people. We feel this structure is best, but we ultimately agree with our worship leader Grant who says:

When we begin to worship the structure or worship the policy, it causes a church to turn inward on itself and only think about itself. So I'm a fan of bylaws when they give us guidance...a lot of polity was written for the sake of maintaining Congregationalism...[but] I don't like polity when we don't get to be Jesus.

I love being a congregationalist because "my opinion is only one, but it is one." We have to be the priesthood of believers - which has always been plural for a reason. It's how we discern something together. The Holy Spirit's going to lead us all in the same direction. He's not going to tell someone one thing and then tell others something else.

Shepherding the Family: The Spiritual Authority Narrative

How do we make decisions? Well, of course we are a priesthood of believers, and *ideally* I'm no more of a voice than my assistant Violet who sits next door and helps me. We're a family in the body of Christ, and so we all have a part and a place. But even families have different roles. This became really apparent when we changed our worship structure about a year ago. It was a very sensitive issue with a lot of different viewpoints, and as a staff we really struggled with what to do. Ultimately, the way Pastor Austin made sense of it really brought us a peace about how to proceed. He said:

This place is our home. And we proceed in the direction that God has led this body to proceed. Now, if we're sitting in a room of 200 people, and there's three different views out there, well, what do you do? Well, ultimately, you go with the

shepherd who has been called to this place by the body. In our case, all of us agreed that he [Pastor Matthew] was to be our shepherd – the responsibility is on his shoulders to be following God the closest.

And he does. Besides my dad, Pastor Matthew is one of the godliest men I've ever known. He's had to make some really tough decisions in the short time he's been here. I think he truly wants to involve people, but he also needs to be assured by the fact that we support him as our spiritual guide. I remember one time when we were talking about the worship stuff in a staff meeting, and it got a little emotional. We were encouraging Matthew to make the ultimate decision, and he kept saying that he was afraid of looking like a dictator. Pastor Martin tried to get him to think of it differently:

I don't think anybody has a more direct line to God. But I think the church has called us here to lead. And while I'm not a proponent of dictatorship at all, I am a proponent of if you hire me to cook the food, let me go buy the ingredients to cook with.

The church is one of those places where everybody feels like they have a say - and they do. But ultimately, when there are too many cooks in the proverbial kitchen, the decision has to fall on the shepherd who's closest to God. In a way, you do need a dictator – a benevolent dictator that will look out for God's will and everyone's best interests.

This isn't just a pastoral point of view, though. Even other staff members and congregants realize that this is the godly way. For example, I overheard Matthew's assistant, Dorothy, defend this mentality several times to other church members. People look to her for insight on how the whole worship process went down, and she would generally say, "There were some specific changes and things that they just did on their

own. But as a whole part...they kind of looked at the situation and they talked to each other...they did fine.” The most telling thing about this is that Dorothy and really many of the older people in the church weren’t happy about the change to a more contemporary service. But they were the same people who realized that you have to defer to your spiritual leader. Like our church receptionist, Hazel. She told Pastor Matthew, “You have to do it. And I understand even though I’m one of the old school that likes it same old, same old. I know you have to do it.”

This issue of spiritual authority also became a big thing with our recent financial troubles. Matthew was always very clear in communicating to the church body that this was a spiritual thing, not a money thing. He was really convicted about it, and so we all got behind him. And like before, it wasn’t just “we” the pastors. Some of the biggest supporters of Pastor Matthew’s views and decisions on this situation were committee chairs. For example, our Missions Committee chair, Philip, actually got into a lot of hot water for defending our point of view. Then there was Nelson, our Finance chair, who at first glance you might think really didn’t want to defer to the pastors and their spiritual authority, but he was also one of our biggest supporters. I heard that he was a little timid during the committee meetings when they talked about this, but I’ve heard him also say, “I absolutely agree with Pastor Matthew. He has his hand on the pulse of God, and I trust his assessment about what’s going on.”

You see, when you’ve got a godly pastor like Matthew you can be sure that he’ll make the best decisions – not because he’s the guy in charge, but because he’s the closest to Christ. That’s what drew me here to Downtown Baptist. When I got the call about the Youth Minister opening, I was initially interested because Pastor Matthew and I share an

uncle by marriage and that was kind of a neat connection. But what really hooked me was Matthew's, and really everyone's, strong faith. I can just feel God's hand on us, leading us where He wants us to go. There's such a legacy, or lineage, I guess, of ministry here, too. Matthew, Walter, Donald, Tricia – almost all the pastors here are second or even third generation ministers. Old Pastor Walter, he loves to call himself a “PK” [preacher's kid]. If you get him talking about his years in ministry, he's sure to tell you, “Yes! My dad was a pastor, too. I'm a PK, I'm a PK! And all my life I've literally been in the pastorium – living, growing up, or finally having my own – all my life.” Talk about a legacy.

When you've got that much blood that runs deep, as a congregation member you know that you can trust your leaders. At least I would like to think that. The fact that my dad is still a practicing pastor and I was called to ministry at a very young age hopefully gives me a little bit of credence with the parents of my youth. Through me, they know that their kids are being led to take part in stuff that's God inspired. Our Children's Minister, Tricia, she's gives a great explanation to families of how she makes decisions, too. She puts it this way:

The Meyers-Briggs says I work on intuition, but I feel like that's not what I'm basing things on: feelings. But I think God works in that. That there is a whole God-intuition combo going on, and that's called the Holy Spirit – that He works with those nudges or whatever. So, that's what I mean by “I'm faithful” so you [parents] “be faithful”, too.

Does that make us pastors passionate, even forceful, sometimes? Well, I must admit that's true. We can get a little zealous. Tricia has things that she calls her “non-

negotiables,” and she doesn’t hide this. She admits that if she feels strongly about something, she’ll tell the Children’s Committee, “This is not good, sound. We’re not going to offer this program...I’m comfortable with my non-negotiables.” Even I’ve been guilty of declaring to my Youth Committee Chair, “Sometimes I have to be the tie-breaker and do difficult things...two plus two equals four and there is no other decision.” So when all is said and done, you do have to be the dictator, but a benevolent dictator. And that’s what we did with the worship situation. Like Pastor Joe says, “We did the discerning. That’s why I say we did it right even though people say we didn’t...[they just needed to] get themselves out of the way and see what God is telling the other group.”

When all is said and done, we have the church’s interests at heart – maybe even to a fault. We get so wrapped up in relationships and trying to thoughtfully shepherd others that stuff sometimes takes much longer than it should. No one knows this better than Howard, our Media Director. He gets all of these people who want to help with music and worship, and he’s so kind. We visited with him as a staff prior to his hiring, and I’ll never forget his take on the tedious nature of church work. He simply said, “You have to be extremely patient with people...With a church you have to learn that, yes, that person may be incompetent, but they may really, really want to do it...helping them fulfill their ministry and mission sometimes takes patience.”

Is this insane from a typical business standpoint? Absolutely. But that’s how we have to make decisions here. For example, the daycare kills us from a financial stance, but even Pastor Tricia will tell you, “We view it as an outreach of our church. If not, we should close the doors because financially it wears on the building.” So, yes, decisions are slow and, yes, sometimes they don’t make sense to outsiders, but ultimately it’s the

greatest and only way to do things. My boss, Joe, I think, explains it best. He says, “The process has to be, ‘if I do this, is it going to bring people closer to Christ? Is it going to help them see God in a new and different way? And so your bottom line is a little different.”

Unfortunately, people take advantage of this sometimes. People sometimes push us pastors around, and we’re all really conflicted about it. Just the other day Pastor Martin admitted, “There are times I have to take a step back and go a different route to appease some people. And I don’t know if that’s good or bad.” On the one hand, it’s almost infuriating to know that some volunteers and even staff members treat the church environment like a training camp for slackers and incompetence. But on the other hand, everything we do as pastors presents a picture of Christ to the people we deal with. That’s a pretty heavy responsibility to bear. And of all of us, Matthew, Tricia, and Peter probably have to deal with it the most. Obviously Matthew is the face of the church and so people are always watching his every move. Tricia deals with it a lot with the daycare, too. Sometimes she has to fire workers, and it tears her up. But she has a good perspective:

Some people’s faith is at the very immature state where ministers and Christian people represent God. And if I fire them or I do whatever, then they take that as ‘God is unkind, God is judging, God is this, that, and the other.’ That’s the difference. So we have to be very careful with how we make decisions and are kind to people and deal with them in tricky situations.

Pastor Peter has to deal with it with administrative stuff all the time, as well. I remember he used to have an assistant from a temp agency that just wasn’t working out, so he called

the agency, and they said to just fire her. He told us later, “I’m not going to do that. She has kids. She’s a single mom with two kids! I couldn’t just put her on the street...you’re working with people’s lives, you know?”

I know that must drive the Personnel and Finance Committees nuts, but, all in all, I think they trust us. We’ve got people like our Missions Committee chair, Philip, who are good about supporting the staff and telling others, “You know, ultimately the shepherd [Pastor Matthew] is responsible for the lives, and then his hired hands, so to speak – his other shepherds that help him – and the larger the flock the more hands are needed to rein them [members] in.” Personnel did implement job performance evaluations a while back, but the standards are pretty vague. When your entire vocation is about the Holy Spirit and relationships, it’s a little hard to have a statistical evaluation of how we’re doing, right?

Sheep for Show: The Rubber Stamp Narrative

It’s all good and well that people want to believe in congregationalism, but I just don’t see how they realistically believe it happens. To say that committee service is even a *leadership* position may be a stretch. As another friend and committee chair says, “That may be putting too big a hat on it. It’s a role that needs to be filled, and you’re asked to fill it so you do, but I don’t know necessarily that it’s a leadership role and such.” Why would we say this? Well, because the role isn’t really a collaborative one. I don’t see how people call it an “accountability system” or even a “sounding board.” All in all, we’re still just more of a rubber stamp for decisions that the staff has already made. A friend and fellow committee member once said to me, “It’s serving on church committees that

you can get cynical...and feel like, ‘Gosh, well we prayed for an answer, but the decision’s already been made.’”

Some people may try to convince you that things have drastically changed since Pastor Matthew’s been here, and I will admit it’s better now than it used to be. Pastor Martin even admitted that when he was hired under Pastor Paul he was surprised by how inconsequential the committees were. He said that when he visited with the Personnel Committee he assumed it was an important part of the hiring process but “came to find out it was more of a...Paul had pretty much made up his mind.” So, no, we don’t have as many stories as before. Like my friend’s experience on the Children’s Committee ten years ago:

I was told [after a year] I was off the committee – I didn’t know if my time had actually run up or if I just asked too many questions and kind of said, “Wait a minute. We shouldn’t be doing that. That’s not a good use of our money.”

Because I got the distinct impression that...I wasn’t really there trying to help. I was just there to give some legitimacy to the programs.

In comparing then and now he would say, “Paul was really much more of a very strong CEO that didn’t really want anybody giving him advice on how to do stuff. And I think that Matthew is much more is open to that kind of thing.”

So, yes, Matthew is more open to input, but ultimately the staff still make all of the decisions. The whole notion that we’re a pure democracy or some priesthood of believers is somewhat of a farce. The perfect case and point was our whole worship style debacle last year. The congregation was supposed to see all the options, but even one of the staff members admitted to me, “I don’t think they were....well, I know they weren’t

presented with all the options...I think they were kind of pushed in a direction.” Even the deacons will tell you:

Our job is to serve and support...to be an encourager, promote goodwill and ministry and work being the scenes for the goodwill of the church...most people think [we’re] the decision-making group that decides on key matters such as budget, schedules, programming, and financial things, but that’s not the case.

Instead, we sit on these committees, and if we even try to present an opposing view, we get a whole bunch of God talk - the “Oh, you must have faith and believe” – rhetoric that pastors throw at you to keep you quiet. I know it sounds cynical, but I can’t help but think that sometimes. I talked with some other committee members about this recently, and one of them pointed out, “You know, our interpretation of what God wants us to do – even pastors – is almost always going to be colored a little bit by our bias that we had going in.” Another member responded along the same lines saying, “Yeah, I realize these people are called by God to do this, but you never see a preacher feel called to go to a smaller church and earn a smaller salary.”

The craziest thing about that kind of God talk way of communicating is that some of our own pastors have been victims of it. Take Pastor Austin, for example. He told me a story one time that made my blood run cold, and it went something like this:

I was diagnosed as a diabetic at the age of 10, and when I was 13 one of the ladies in the church said that God had told her that He was going to heal me of my diabetes, and that I just need to sit down in this circle and they were all going to lay their hands on me and pray for me and I would be healed. Well, I’ve still got my pump on my side...several weeks later she was feeling somewhat guilty about

it, I guess, and she told me that my faith wasn't strong enough, and that's why God didn't heal me.

Can you believe that? And I'm not saying that Austin or any of the other pastors are maliciously acting this way to avoid dealing with conflict, but it's hard not to be guarded. For example, recently there was a committee chair position that needed to be filled, and there were a couple of people on the committee who probably should have been nominated. However, neither one of those people were asked to take the spot. Afterward, one of the lay leaders told me, "I think [the pastors] didn't want them to be the chairman because they were going to butt heads." When I asked why they chose the particular person who was selected, he said this person is "more, you know, 'God will provide this for us' kind of thought process."

I fear sometimes, though, that I'm too cynical. What if these people are just more in touch with God than I am? With issues like finances and determining God's will, I take the same approach as some of the other committee members who say, "This is what God wants us to do because He's given us this much money to do it" or "God calls you to whatever it is that you're already doing, and that's your ministry." But what if I'm just not faithful enough? What if I just can't hear God telling us that He wants us to go for a \$3 million dollar budget or take steps X, Y, and Z? The thing that bothers me more, though, is the fact that the pastors are probably not malicious or manipulative at all. They probably just truly believe that God is telling them what to do. After all, one of my fellow skeptics once pointed out, "Church administrators take that step of faith and have said, 'My life will be dedicated to spiritually based, faith based deals.' And everybody that serves on a committee has not been led to live life based that much on faith." This same

person challenged Pastor Matthew on his take that our financial shortfalls were a sign of “spiritual disobedience.” He felt horrible afterward and told me, “I know he may believe that, and that’s okay. And who am I to say whether it is or is not?”

So I guess we just don’t know who’s right. I wish I was like my friend, Howard, who’s been a member forever and is now the Media Director. He’s good about testing that out carefully and saying, “Okay now let’s follow that through to its conclusion. If that’s what we’re supposed to do, this is going to happen...now, do you really think that is the direction that God wants us to go?” As for myself, I usually fail to take the time and effort to do that. I wish I would, though. Maybe then I would be able to tactfully question what I view as irresponsible staff decisions. Instead, I usually say something like, “We have no money for this random thing” when pastors say things like, “I’ll be Polly Anna. I think everything we do is missional” or “When God’s involved it needs to be different.”

If I was really being honest someday I would just come out and say, “Everybody is kind of operating under this banner of God in some way that is an excuse, in my book, for certain laziness.” That probably wouldn’t go over well, but it’s true. I don’t think the staff wants to go through the hard work of truly being a congregationalist church because if we did, it would certainly be hard. I think they tried to do it with the worship style change, but then they just got tired of having to hold up the democracy. So instead they just pushed through and sold what they already thought was right.

Ultimately, I’m not sure I blame them, though. Beyond the sheer time commitment, I can understand why pastors treat committees like a rubber stamp because many of us, myself included, are either too ignorant or too apathetic to do what’s necessary to proactively engage in the process. Ask the average committee member about

how something on the committee works or who is responsible for what, and they will likely tell you, “I have no earthly idea.” Until last year we didn’t even have an orientation or any type of informational meeting for new committee members, much less some type of training session. As for me, I’ve never even seen a copy of the church bylaws, and I’ve been on three committees! With such a lack of information all we can really do is:

Basically just respond to brush fires, and you know, if there were a problem that came up, we were asked to address it....you get around by doing something about something, you know, when the Titanic is almost, you’re already going under. We go through the motions of, you know, saying grace over it or putting our hands on it or whatever. But it’s a reactive system not a proactive system, because you know with just nine members we really can’t be in a position to really make decisions and that sort of thing.

And even if we did have the information and resources to make the decisions, I’m not sure that’s even the proper way to do it. In business you don’t run a business where you make a committee and they can tell the boss what to do. So, are we ultimately a rubber stamp? Yes, but I’m not sure that there’s another realistic alternative.

Silent Lambs: The Separation Narrative

As a staff person who’s not a member of the church, I often “call myself Switzerland” around the office. And while I don’t feel entirely separated myself, I can empathize with those who do, so I’ll speak on their behalf. I represent an inconspicuous group of pastoral assistants, part-time employees, and even a few associate pastors who love this church but are disappointed by the lack of communication and collaboration on church matters. They feel like their voices aren’t heard and they are continually alienated

from decision-making processes and implementation. A common sentiment from these associate and assistant staff members is that their pastoral supervisors “really didn’t give me an idea of what [they] wanted me to do.” Further, some might even admit, “it’s probably not healthy the amount of autonomy we have” or “I don’t know what’s going on with the church, and no one ever really lets me know.”

Apparently, communication hasn’t always been this poor, though. Several staff members who have been here for many years claim that openness has declined in just the past year alone. For example, one staff person told me, “I think the communication and balance has really been a struggle in the past year...Matthew almost to a detriment sometimes doesn’t communicate.” Along the same lines, an assistant recently told me a story that truly shows how much the communication has suffered:

I will say this, communication used to be good when I started, but as I’ve been here it has dwindled a little bit. Assistants used to be involved in the Tuesday staff meeting, and we used to have more communication and listen to what was going on. But then one day they [the pastors] just kind of WOOSH! Took that ax - sorry, can’t come anymore! You’re not important! I think a lot of the assistants had trouble with that when we stopped going. Peter was going to type up an email – like notes – and send it out to all the assistants [each week], but he only did that once.

A similar situation occurred when one of the associates was hired. That person told me that a month after being hired, “They’re like, ‘We’re sorry, we have to cut the pay. So they cut the pay, but then they forgot to reduce it in payroll, so for like six months I’m making the same. Then they just cut it.”

This poor communication has made this group of people feel somewhat rejected and left out of the loop; this is particularly true for those who don't work in the main building. These employees feel extremely detached and, at times, devalued by the majority of the church staff. This is most apparent for one person when, "We do staff lunches once a month, and it's awkward...it is very separate, and the ministers will come down here every once in a while...but they don't know me. We're in our own little world here." Another person echoed this point of view when he once vented, "It just seems like – have y'all [pastors] even been down here?" The people that experience this detachment say it doesn't just affect them emotionally – it also affects their job performance. One of them told me after a recent church event, "We [the staff housed outside the main campus] are not going to be as effective as if the whole church staff came over. I'd like to see them take more ownership."

So, as you can see, there are a number of reasons why these people feel uninformed and uninvolved in the decision-making process. And, honestly, they *aren't* involved in many decisions – big or small. I've witnessed it myself. For whatever reason, "I think I have a little bit more 'in' with the staff here." I don't know if it's because I grew up around the ministry or because I'm not a member, but I am treated a bit differently than the people for whom I'm speaking. For example:

So I'll get stuck in a room and all of a sudden it becomes a staff meeting, you know. They'll [pastors] just kind of all trickle in...and all of a sudden they start talking about things that I haven't seen them talk about with any of the regular assistants.

Perhaps the senior staff simply doesn't want the associates and assistants involved in making decisions, or perhaps they think these employees don't have anything to contribute. I wouldn't fully understand either rationale, though. We have one of the most qualified support staffs I've ever known of or seen. We even have assistants with seminary and other masters' degrees. In fact, some of our assistants and associates even have more education than our senior pastors. Nonetheless, they are either intentionally or unintentionally left out of many decisions.

In all reality, though, some things would have to change before these people could make a productive impact on decisions. As you can probably infer by now, presently they just don't have the information or resources to contribute to the decision-making process. Many of them don't even know how their own supervisor makes decisions. One of the assistants admitted, for example, "Some of the decisions that he comes up with I have no idea how he came up with. I don't know how his thought process works on decisions because he doesn't tell us." Others realize they literally aren't in the right place at the right time to experience how staff members make decisions. Another assistant speculated, "I think they make a lot of those decisions in staff meetings so I don't get to see that...if I go in there and ask questions I can see it, but I don't see it one on one." Consequently, this group of people often feels like decisions don't make sense or policies are applied inconsistently to support some decisions over others. For example, several staff members have voiced confusion and frustration regarding the protocol for hiring a new staff member. With regard to hires in recent years, these people have grumbled, "They didn't bring anyone else in...that is something I have a problem with" or "[He] wasn't even hired through a Personnel Committee. He was just brought in by [a pastor]!"

You might be asking yourself: Why don't they just say anything if they are so frustrated with the current situation? I have voiced the same question myself, but I'm usually told that they feel like voicing frustrations or engaging in conflict violates the norms. To demonstrate, there is a part-time staff member who feels like there is tension between him and his pastor; yet when I ask him about this situation he says that it continues to be very passive. He feels like he can't just come out and say, "Do you feel like we're stepping on your toes with this?" Along the same lines, one of my fellow assistants has joked that you can't violate the "ministerial spirit." She describes this as, "You know, you're being fake to act like everything's okay."

Certainly this passivity isn't productive, but I can't say that I completely blame them. The few times that staff members have broken norms to seek out answers or press for action, there have been some pretty uncomfortable experiences. Nowhere was this more apparent than when another person joined the staff who didn't attend the church. As part of this person's job he/she is supposed to occasionally work on Sundays, which prevents this person from attending his/her home church. When the person spoke up about it, the following transpired:

I told them Sunday morning were really hard for me because I go to another church, and they were basically like, "Sorry, everyone does it. You have to work." Well, I asked the ladies that do it, "Can I take someone's Wednesday nights and they can do my Sunday mornings?" And right after I sent that email I got a call from [a pastor] that said, "You can't do that." And that really upset me. It was really hard, so I just sent out an email real quick that said, "Nevermind, I'll be working Sunday mornings."

Fortunately, someone else spoke up about it and it was eventually worked out, but it really adversely affected this person overall. Another example is when a staff member decided to speak with the senior staff about problems he/she had encountered with another staff person. Apparently, these complaints fell on deaf ears:

Several of us went and talked to [a senior minister], and he said, “I’m aware of the issues [but] quit complaining about [the problem staff member]. He’s doing his job.” He said he was going to talk to [the problem staff member] about it, but he never did, and things have just kind of gotten worse.

Don’t get me wrong, this silent group doesn’t hate their jobs. Rather, they truly love the church and most of the people with whom they work. They even respect the pastoral staff overall and want to see them succeed. However, they do feel like their voices are not being heard. They feel ill-equipped and undervalued when it comes to collaboratively making decisions for their ministry.

Epilogue

At this point, I, the researcher reenter the scene and attempt to take the “paradoxical, if not schizophrenic, attitude” of switching from an insider voice (through the authorial voice of my participants) to an outsider perspective on the narratives presented in this chapter (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 77). In presenting these four narratives, I attempted to give a voice to all the participants in this study (Fine et al., 2003), thus, demonstrating the multiple interpretations of the D/discourses that inform Downtown Baptist organizing (RQ2a/b). In this section, I summarize and offer some additional scholarly insight into each narrative, and then I discuss the narratives as a whole. Table 6.1 provides a comparison of these collective narratives.

Congregationalist Narrative

The congregationalist narrative typifies the espoused governance of Downtown Baptist as proclaimed in their organizational documents (e.g., constitution and bylaws). In championing the ideals of the priesthood of the believer and democratic participation, the congregationalist narrative also exemplifies the most overtly endorsed narrative of the entire Baptist denomination. The voices represented in this narrative believe a new day has dawned in the life of their church where congregationalist polity is restored and lay leaders once again serve as an accountability system for the pastoral authority. Nonetheless, they also warn that the policies and rules that govern this inclusive approach to organizing may destroy the church if they are dogmatically upheld. These congregationalists are cognizant of the competing *rubber stamp* narrative, but they dismiss it as the cynical minority.

In her review of and proposed research agenda for the civil society sector, Lewis (2005) asks, “To what degree is survival [in these organizations] dependant on inclusiveness practices?” (p. 258). Voices of the *congregationalist* narrative would likely contend that Downtown Baptist may survive (as it did for many years under Pastor Paul), but it certainly wouldn’t thrive without the democratic participation of congregants and pastors alike. The congregationalist narrative further emphasizes that democratic organizing relies on a healthy balance between structure and adaptation. When applied to McPhee and Zaug’s (2000/2009) CCO framework, this narrative emphasizes the inextricable relationship between the stability of *reflexive self-structuring* and the flexibility of *activity coordination*.

Spiritual Authority Narrative

The *spiritual authority* narrative does not wholly undermine that “priesthood of the believer” ideal, but it does see limits in its application. As such, the voices of the *spiritual authority* narrative exhibit tempered support of the *congregationalist* narrative for several reasons. Some of these voices generally support the *congregationalist* ideals, but they believe that this egalitarian system cannot be carried out all the time. Time constraints and stalemates, for example, are circumstances which necessitate the person or group with the greatest spiritual authority to ultimately make a decision. Other *spiritual authority* voices qualify their support of the *congregationalist* narrative on principled grounds. That is, they believe that pastors, as people specifically called by God to church service and hired by the church body, are more entitled to be the final authority on a decision or issue. The *spiritual authority* narrative does not sanction dictatorial, intolerant rule, though. Conversely, these voices argue that this form of benevolent authority requires significant patience, tact, and time which, consequently, produces decisions that preserve relationships but often defy traditional “business sense.”

While many of the voices in this narrative belong to pastors, support staff and lay leaders also endorse this hierarchical authority. This reality resembles Coopman and Meidlinger’s (2000) observational study of a Catholic church staff wherein they discovered that most of the support staff ultimately reinforced the hierarchical authority of the priest. Likewise, this narrative reinforces scholarly conceptualizations of the religious authority structure, a form of authority that is based in the individual’s claim to supernatural connection with God and His will for the group or organization (see Chaves, 1993; Schoenherr, 1987; Weber, 1978).

Rubber Stamp Narrative

The *rubber stamp* narrative is firmly rooted in the present and sees the church's current condition as largely similar to its past. Thus, this narrative exhibits skepticism toward both the *congregationalist* and *spiritual authority* narratives but for different reasons. This narrative views the congregationalists as aggrandizing the democratic changes incurred since Pastor Paul's retirement. They do not contend that the competing congregationalist voices are artificial; they simply think they are misguided or overly idealistic. Conversely, the rubber stamp narrative does characterize some spiritual authority voices as contrived. That is, they see the appeal to spiritual authority as a rhetorical device used for control. This notion is similar to Conrad's (1988) observation of the "mini-theologies" used to persuade others at Southern Baptist church meetings.

Nonetheless, the voices of this narrative concede that they often feel guilty or uncertain about this assessment. Accordingly, the members represented in this narrative may doubt their own faithfulness at times. While the rubber stamp narrative effectually indicts pastors for their use of "God talk" as a means to control decisions, they do not wholly criticize them for circumventing the democratic process. Rather, the rubber stamp voices acknowledge that pure democracy is almost destined to fall short chiefly because lay leaders fail to do their job. In essence, these voices concede that lay leaders are susceptible to prototypical volunteer characteristics of unreliability, unpredictability, and bias (Pearce, 1993).

Separation Narrative

Finally, the group of associate pastors and support staff who comprise the *separation* narrative authentically care for Downtown Baptist and their pastorate.

However, these members feel systematically isolated, underutilized, and largely ignorant about the overall organizational processes of the church. This narrative challenges Pearce's (1993) assumption that "volunteers simply face less crystallized expectations about their behavior, purposes, and affective reactions than do paid workers" (p. 4). Rather, this narrative demonstrates that paid support staff and even some associate pastors possessed at least a comparable level of role ambiguity as lay leaders (i.e., volunteers).

This narrative epitomizes what Clair (1993) refers to as a *sequestered narrative*, an irregular story that does not garner the same public acknowledgement and esteem as more mainstream organizational narratives (i.e., the congregationalist and spiritual authority narratives). Like a sequestered narrative, the voices represented in the separation narrative feel like they cannot openly share their feelings of ignorance and alienation. This reluctance stems in part from fears of being reprimanded or simply the resignation that it won't make a difference. More so, though, the majority of the reluctance to express discontent arises from the perceived pressure to maintain the "ministerial spirit" or guise that everything is okay. This characterization of the ministerial spirit aligns largely with McGuire's (2010) conceptualization of *spiritual labor*, a construct derived from the more widely recognizable concept of emotional labor.

The Narratives as a Whole

Together, these narratives demonstrate that some aspects of organizing are highlighted in public forums such as meetings while others are more marginalized (Brown, 1998; Boje, 1991; 1995; Clair, 1993). In this case, the *congregationalist* and *spiritual authority* narratives appear to most closely mirror the organizing processes

observed in my fieldwork while the *rubber stamp* and *separation* narratives are more latent in observable interaction. The narratives represent more than the varied ways that the participants made sense of their organizational world (Weick, 1995; Pentland, 1999).

Table 6.1

Comparison of Narratives in Downtown Baptist Organizing

Comparison	Congregationalist Narrative	Spiritual Authority Narrative	Rubber Stamp Narrative	Separation Narrative
Central narrator	Tom (deacon)	Pastor Chris	Committee chair	Support staff employee
Additional voices	Support staff; lay leaders; some pastors	Pastors mainly; other support staff and lay leaders	Lay leaders	Support staff; associate pastors;
Point of view	Believe accountability is fostered by multi-level input; embrace rules as long as they don't stifle Spirit-led decisions	Pastors, as God's leaders, are ultimately responsible for decision-making	See forums for lay participation (e.g., committees) as façade rather than functional	Feel detached and/or estranged from decision-making processes; also feel uninformed
Morals/values	Collaboration; priesthood (member) power; checks and balances	Supernatural calling; pastoral power; relationships	Pragmatism; realism	Transparency; frequent, multi-level communication
Orientation toward other narratives	See <i>spiritual authority</i> narrative as appropriate in rare circumstances; resist <i>rubber stamp</i> narrative; unaware of <i>separation</i> narrative	Tempered support of <i>congregationalist</i> narrative; largely unaware of <i>rubber stamp</i> and <i>separation narratives</i>	View <i>congregationalist</i> narrative as unrealistic and largely fictitious; Skeptical of <i>spiritual authority</i> narrative; sympathetic to <i>separation narrative</i>	Unaware of or disenchanted with other narratives

These narratives shape not only the individuals in the organization, but also the organization itself (Brown, 1998). They bear constitutive force in the organization of Downtown Baptist and will be discussed further in the following chapter.

This chapter offered a different perspective on the research questions by creating narrative representations of participant interview responses. As narrative is “infused with

motive” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001, p. 1002), my motive as the grand narrator of these four tales was to represent the multiplicity of voices in Downtown Baptist organizing. The narratives of *congregationalism*, *spiritual authority*, *rubber stamp*, and *separation* represent members’ divergent experiences with and influences on the communicative constitution of the church. The next chapter draws together the results from this and the previous chapter to discuss the study’s collective insights and implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Beyond simply being interesting and well-supported, the product of one's research must also offer a substantive contribution to the field (Richardson, 2000). In this chapter, I discuss the contributions that the present study makes to organizational communication theory and research. First, I address the broader role that immaterial entities may play in the communicative constitution of organizations (RQ3a). Second, I synthesize the case study results detailed in Chapters Five and Six into a discussion of the communicative constitution of Downtown Baptist organizing (RQ3b). Third, I highlight the implications of this case study for research and practice in church organizing and other third sector contexts. Finally, I acknowledge the case study's limitations and suggest several avenues for future research.

Immateriality and CCO Theorizing

This section speaks to one of the final research questions as I examine how the present study enhances and challenges current theorizing on the communicative constitution of organizations. Broadly, this discussion attuned to a central CCO question: Who and/or what communicates in the organizing process and how? While scholars have taken great strides in addressing this question, there is one issue that has received little attention in CCO theorizing to date. Thus, I speak specifically to the role that immaterial entities may play in the communicative constitution of organizations. Whether it be a supernatural deity or spirit, as was the focus in this case study and various studies of organizational spirituality (e.g., Kirby et al., 2006; McGuire, 2010; Scott, 2007), or other ethereal elements like intuition and aesthetics (e.g., Harter et al., 2008; Warren, 2008), an adequate CCO theory should account for these immaterial entities. Failing to do so

perpetuates the exact binaries Putnam and McPhee (2009) condemn and further restricts organizational communication theory and research within its present secular hegemony (Rodriguez, 2001; see also, Buzzanell & Harter, 2006; Harter & Buzzanell, 2007).

But how do we engage immateriality in CCO theorizing? Because CCO theorizing is still in its developmental stages, I adopted a general CCO ontological perspective without clinging to any particular theoretical premise (e.g., inductive/deductive; bottom up/top down) or vein of scholarly thought (e.g., McPhee, J. R. Taylor, or Cooren). Rather, with this case study I engaged in the theory building process of “look[ing] for other implications of the [general] theory and other facts to contradict or support it” (Campbell, 1975, p. 186; see also, Eisenhardt, 1989). In essence, I was open to the value of conducting what Campbell (1975) refers to as a theory-infirming case study, an inquiry that is open to the possibility that the data may not corroborate the theory under study.

As I discussed in the introduction of this dissertation (Chapter One), there are two strands of immateriality that must be considered: (a) ineffably abstract forces (e.g., sixth sense, intuition, aesthetic imagination) and (b) more specifically spirit- or deity-based forces (e.g., faith-oriented influence of angels, Trinitarian Holy Spirit, the ghost of a loved one). As the present case study centered on the latter form of immateriality, I do not advance a precise theoretical position on the former. However, I briefly address the notion of abstract materiality to establish juxtaposition for my more central discussion of spirit-/deity-based immateriality. The literature to date conceptualizes abstract materiality as existing somewhere between the human actors (e.g., organizational members) and material resources (e.g., buildings, artifacts) that inform CCO. To illustrate, Warren

(2008) conceptualizes aesthetics as “an oscillation between the two - aesthetic experiences/judgments are subjective [*human*] reactions to *material things* (real or imagined) but cannot be reduced to one or the other” (p. 561, emphasis added; see also Linstead & Höpfl, 2000). I lean on this notion of oscillation to advance my view of the relationship between human actors and faith-oriented (i.e., spirit-/deity-based) entities in the communicative constitution of organizations.

The Role of Spirit-/Deity-Based Immateriality

The literature to date suggests that spirit-/deity-based immateriality (i.e., faith-oriented immateriality) is unique in that the supernatural entity functions as an agent in communication and organizational processes (e.g., Chatham, 2006; Poloma, 1997; Scott, 2007). However, over the course of this case study I arrived at a different conclusion for how this form of immateriality informs CCO. I attempt to address the “God problem” that confronts communication studies by advancing a theoretical view of the role that spirit-/deity-based entities play in organizing (Schultze, 2005). It is important to note that these are theoretical premises regarding organizational communication and not theological statements about the nature of God and human beings. Before I advance my view of the role that faith-oriented immateriality plays in CCO, I first address two potential conceptualizations that *did not* adequately account for this phenomenon in the present case study.

Not quite human, not quite material. First, the results of this case study suggest that faith-oriented entities are not simply resources that human actors use in the process of organizing. In Downtown Baptist, God is viewed by many members as a conscious, aware, and dynamic. For example, during the course of DB’s financial challenges, God

was viewed by many as alternately withholding and then restoring His blessing on the church. This view aligns with several scholars' views of human agency as the capacity to exercise some form of power and, therefore, "at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently" (Giddens, 1984, p. 9; see also McPhee & Iverson, 2009). Cohen (1989) similarly expresses this view in his declaration that "social agents always are seen to retain the capability to act otherwise than they do" (p. 45). Thus, I propose that spirit-/deity-based entities may be imbued with some element of human-like power and influence in the process of communicatively constituting an organization.

However, my research also suggests that faith-oriented entities are not fully equal to human agents in how they influence the organizing process. That is, God did not act as an *independent* agent (as humans did) in the context of Downtown Baptist organizing. Throughout the duration of my study, no one depicted God as a detached entity who voiced a separate view. Rather, people typically positioned God as working through and with them. To illustrate, Pastor Matthew claimed that "God *through him*" would change the congregants' attitudes and habits toward tithing rather than God alone. In this statement, the pastor elevates God to an actor status but acknowledges his own human role in shaping organizational decisions and actions. Thus, God is not an actor in the same sense as a human actor either (see Giddens, 1984; McPhee & Iverson, 2000). Consequently, I propose a hybrid view of spirit/deity agency in organizing that is addressed in turn.

The hybrid agency of spirit-/deity-based entities. The hybrid view of spirit/deity agency positions these entities as actors but only insofar as other human actors speak through and/or with them. This modified view of agency is modeled after

Crable's (1990) conceptualization of the "Hollywood actor" as a different type of actor in organizational life. Rather than acting independently, these actors "speak the lines created for them by writers, interpreted for them by directors, and approved for them by producers and financiers" (p. 120). Put differently, this type of actor is a representative for other actors who ultimately create the "lines." In applying this idea to faith-oriented entities and CCO, I develop two opposing views that are addressed in turn. Nonetheless, one thread remains consistent in both. That is, the relationship between human actor and spirit-/deity-actor is inextricable. Like scholars' views of aesthetics as an "oscillation" between the human and the material (see Linstead & Höpfl, 2000; Warren, 2008), faith-oriented forces are bound up in human actions. The first view of this relationship gives primacy to human actors as the true "writers" of the CCO script.

Traditional roles (God/actor and human/writer). In most of my observations and interviews, God was positioned as the "Hollywood actor" and the Downtown Baptist members acted as the "writers", "directors", "producers and financiers." This view of God-human agency connotes two ideas about the role of spirits/deities in CCO. First, this view stipulates that organizational members largely shape who the spirits/deities are and what they think and feel. This idea was often voiced in interviews as evidenced in Pastor Matthew's own admission that "a lot of times when God is speaking to people we think we're hearing God, but we're hearing more of our self. And it's up to...[people to] make the ultimate decision of where God is leading us." Thus, there was typically an unsaid acknowledgement among the group that any amount of "God talk" per se is ultimately shaped by humans who write and interpret the lines. In many ways, this conceptualization is similar to the legal view on organizations as agents. That is, organizations as entities

can be listed as defendants in a lawsuit (e.g., Enron, British Petroleum) and essentially viewed as agents in the eyes of the law; however, all parties realize that organizations are only culpable insofar as *human members* who act on behalf of the organization (i.e., “speak” for the organization) provoke some form of malfeasance or neglect. Likewise, it is the human actors who must appear in court, not the organization as actor. In the same way, God may act as a (Hollywood) actor, but it is human organizational members who shape these actions.

The second point that goes along with this God/actor and human/writer view of communication is the idea that this relationship can shift along a continuum from highly restricted to highly flexible. By highly restricted I mean that the human/writer exercises almost exclusive control in what the God/actor says, and by extension, thinks and feels. This view is similar to Cooren’s (2008) discussion of actors as “ventriloquists” for other actors. This view is exemplified in participant responses including, for example, “You know, we make God up to be whoever we want Him to be. One day He wants this and the next day He wants that, but we all know we’re really doing this.” Thus, this end of the continuum, positions “God talk” as a rhetorical device that human actors use in organizing.

On the other end of this continuum is the view that the relationship between God/actor and human/writer is highly flexible and even collaborative. To extend Crable’s (1990) Hollywood actor illustration, in this view the actor (i.e., God) may negotiate with the writers/directors/producers (i.e., human members) to rewrite some of the lines in the script (i.e., God’s words as an organizational actor). This is similar to Schultze’s (2005) theistic view of God-human communication wherein both parties may engage in a

conversation. It is important to note that this conversation occurs “off set”, though in the context of an organization; that is, the collaboration between God and the organizational member does not transpire during meetings and amidst most organizational activities. Rather, the human actor enters the organizational setting and relays his/her account of this supernatural encounter. For example, in DB meetings, pastors might refer to God’s proactive influence in their private prayer lives (i.e., an “off set” encounter) to account for God’s view on an issue or decision.

This continuum view of the God/actor and human/writer relationship in organizing accounts for variations in God’s agency across organizational contexts (e.g., constrained in one setting while prominent in another); likewise, it accounts for occasions in which no “lines” have been written for God by human actors and, therefore, God does not speak (e.g, DB meeting settings where *secular thinking* and *business as usual* codes prevailed). This view also advances CCO theorizing in a way that accounts for the role of spirit-/deity-based entities in organizing but does not equate its role in the process with that of human actors. Conversely, the second view of faith-oriented forces in CCO turns the God-human relationship on its head.

Role reversal (human/actor and God/writer). In contrast to the previous conceptualization of the spirit-/deity-based entity role in organizing, this view positions the human as “Hollywood actor” and God as “writer/director/producer/financier” in the process. Thus, God is now given primacy as the writer while the human actor simply delivers the lines written for him/her. This view, while characteristic of some organizational interactions, is more problematic in that human organizational actors are

positioned as no longer primarily accountable for their actions. This view manifests itself in two ways.

First, this role reversal is evident when human members of the organization insist that their views or actions are almost exclusively determined or “written” by God. Thus, God stands at the forefront of while the human actor becomes more and more decentered in the organization. Some scholars have argued, “the individual has been ‘decentered’ in the contemporary organization to the point that the only significant agency is that of the organization as actor” (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006, p. 123). In this view, however, the individual is decentered to the extent that the only significant agency is that of *God*. Whether it was a decision about “God’s will” for church programming or a “Spirit-led” budget, some members in Downtown Baptist endorsed this view by speaking as if God largely determined organizational decisions while they simply executed them. This human/actor and God/writer reversal typically fostered a negative environment in Downtown Baptist wherein people felt like God was used as an excuse for behaviors and actions. As one of the support staff described it, “we kind of operat[e] under this banner of God in some way that...often times is an excuse, in my book, for certain laziness.”

This role reversal is also evident in a second situation wherein organizational constituents evaluate God solely by the actions of human organizational actors. Because God is positioned as the powerful writer, producer, etc., and the individual is merely a Hollywood actor who speaks the lines, all actions of the individual are a direct reflection of the intentions and character of God. This mentality at Downtown Baptist was illustrated, for example, in Pastor Tricia’s acceptance that her decisions could be perceived as “God is unkind, God is judging, God is this, that, and the other.” This idea

was also exemplified in numerous participants' acknowledgement that they must maintain a proper "ministerial spirit" so as to convey the benevolent character of God.

As Meisenbach and McMillan (2006) note in their review of organizational rhetoric, we must "consider 'who' is really speaking...as well whose interests are being served" when we attribute individual or collective actions to some abstract yet powerful agent (e.g., God) (p. 123). This alternate view of God's role in organizing invites scholars to study its implications for organizational blame, accountability, crisis communication, and control/resistance. Additionally, it invites further inquiry into the potentially hegemonic discourse of the "ministerial spirit." In sum, it accounts for the potentially destructive role that spirit-/deity-based entities may play in an organization's constitution.

Summary of CCO and Immateriality

As both communication and organization are abstract concepts, any effort to elucidate one often comes at the expense of abstracting the other (Putnam, Nicotera, McPhee, 2009). At the risk of doing so, I attempted to shed some light on how communication constitutes organizations by exploring the potential role that immaterial entities play in calling organizations into being. To truly advance a CCO theory that is meaningful across multiple organizational contexts, we should consider immateriality and continue to refine our understandings through empirical research. In this section, I discussed the role that faith-oriented immaterial entities may play in CCO by conceptualizing them as hybrid-agents that are inextricably bound to human communicators. I proposed two views of how spirits/deities are bound to organizational actors: (a) an optimal human primacy view (God/actor and human/writer) and (b) a problematic God primacy view (human/actor and God/writer). The following section

examines the implications of this hybrid spirit/deity agency for Downtown Baptist organizing, a conversation that sets the stage for a subsequent discussion of the case study's broader implications for organizational communication research and practice.

The Communicative Constitution of Downtown Baptist

In this section I attempt to synthesize the scope of data and analyses presented in the previous results chapters and analyze the role of communication in constituting Downtown Baptist. The culmination of the discursive norms that regulate Downtown Baptist meetings (see Chapter Five) and the multiple narratives that represent the lay and staff leadership at the church (see Chapter Six) suggest two interrelated ideas that characterize the church's organizing processes. First, the communication code of *keep the faith* occupies a central role in persuading members, maintaining and contesting status, and upholding the values of the organization. This delicate balance of power- and values-oriented ends leads to the second idea that informs the communicative construction of Downtown Baptist. Each of these ideas is addressed in turn.

The Role of "Spirit-Filled Dialogue"

Demonstrated prominently in the *keep the faith* communication code in Chapter Five and the *spiritual authority* narrative in Chapter Six, so-called "God talk" or spirit-filled dialogue plays a central but varied (and, at times, precarious) role in organizing processes at Downtown Baptist. First, it functions as the ultimate tool for persuasion in organizational communication and decision-making, and, second, it upholds the organization's spiritually-oriented mission and values. As a persuasive tool, spirit-filled dialogue is used as the ultimate "card" that may be played to advance one's view in a conversation; likewise, the playing of this discursive card often ends a potentially

contentious discussion in its tracks. Put simply, spirit-filled dialogue is often employed in Downtown Baptist as a means to ostensibly shut conversations down and effectually forestall or delay a decision until a different time or setting. This persuasive strategy is evidenced in the *code trumping* and *code jumping* discursive practices outlined in Chapter Five. To illustrate, though DB's Constitution and Bylaws clearly dictates how lay and staff leaders should made decisions on a variety of issues, faith-oriented discourses often prevailed in determining who and how decisions were made.

Particularly, the Baptist Faith and Message (featured in the DB Constitution) dictates that Downtown Baptist will adhere to a congregationalist structure wherein all members of the church, not just pastors, have a part in shaping church decisions, programs, and actions. However, members (notably pastors) often invoked language of spiritual authority to downplay the fact that all members are "believer priests" who, having equal access to God, have equal position in discerning God's will and direction for the church.

Additionally, though, faith-oriented discourse also surfaced in member interactions as a more innocuous and peripheral element of the interaction. Evident in the discursive norms of *code compartmentalizing*, these discursive practices appear more geared toward giving credence and homage to the organization's spiritually-oriented values. That is, prayers and devotionals, for example, did not vastly influence decision-making, but they did play a symbolic role in highlighting the organization's overarching mission: "To love God, love others, and make His love known."

In considering in tandem the aforementioned roles of spirit-filled dialogue in Downtown Baptist organizing, it becomes apparent that this discursive practice, while highly imbued with persuasive potential, is not necessarily employed in a manipulative or

corrupt spirit. Rather, as with any persuasive strategy, this discursive practice may be intermittently sincere or contrived, good-natured or ill-conceived. For example, though pastors often utilized spiritual authority to gain power over a decision, it became apparent in my interviews that many of these individuals sincerely believed that the Holy Spirit is guiding them toward correct and upright decisions for the church. As evidenced in the *rubber stamp* narrative, this genuine intent was even discernable to lay leaders who often became frustrated by members' use of spirit-filled dialogue and reasoning. This suggests that all DB lay leaders, whether they employ spirit-filled dialogue or not, accept and even embrace its role within the organization. I elaborate on this idea in turn.

Preservation of DB Values and Objectives

As Chapters Five and Six reveal, though *keep the faith* modes of communication are certainly detectable in DB organizing, the less spiritual elements of *business as usual* and *secular thinking* often prevail in organizational decision-making. As such, it may be perceived that these rational and irrational forms of reasoning may be at odds with one another in the day-to-day practices of organizing in Downtown Baptist. Likewise, it may appear that these contrasting discursive practices would lead to enmity and discord among the various leaders in the church. Conversely, though, I found that each of these elements works together to preserve the, at times, divergent values and objectives of Downtown Baptist. That is, the spiritually oriented discourses helped to preserve the espoused values and mission of the organization while the more rational forms of reasoning help to accomplish the widespread of objectives of any organization (e.g., to maintain operations, financially support the organization, garner support from members and other stakeholders).

Even though these discursive norms may be a source of frustration and confusion for some members as evidenced in various member narratives (e.g., *rubber stamp* and *separation*), these narratives paired with the continual discursive practices suggest that members either implicitly or explicitly acknowledge the utility of these norms in preserving both the spiritual values of the church and accomplishing the day-to-day objectives of Downtown Baptist organizing (e.g., establishing programs, delegating tasks, making financial decisions). Put differently, while the actual communication among members often contrasts their individual feelings and beliefs about how organizing should proceed, ultimately, the members predominantly endorse and uphold the organizational communication norms paramount in the church. In sum, though the discursive practices of Downtown Baptist leaders are varied and, at times, produce negative consequences for members, these practices also ultimately preserve the espoused values as well as the day-to-day objectives of the organization. The insights gleaned from this case study are more broadly applied to the field of organizational communication.

Implications for Third Sector Research and Practice

While contextually bound, the insights from this case may inform scholars' and practitioners' understandings of other church, faith-based, and "member serving" organizational contexts (Frumkin, 2002; see also Lewis, 2005). Particularly, this case study's discussion of faith-oriented forces or entities as the ultimate discursive tool for persuasion points to the central role that certain "God terms" may play in a variety of values-oriented organizational environments (e.g., faith-based organizations and non-profits). For Downtown Baptist, the ultimate "God term" or (persuasive) "card" that

could be played in conversation was actually *God*. For other organizations, it may be “fairness”, “safety”, “freedom” or “volunteer empowerment”, for example. The notion of a God term is more broadly recognized for its application to civil discourse (e.g., the God term of “liberty”, “justice”, or “equality” for American society), but this may readily apply to specific organizations, as well. To illustrate, the value of “safety” may be the ultimate “God term” or “card” that can be played to inform decision-making and action in high reliability organizations (e.g. NASA). Likewise, in a non-profit oriented toward community service, “love” or “goodwill” may be the ultimate discursive tools that members use to influence decisions. The consequences of these discursive practices pervade all areas of organizing. For the remainder of this section, I outline some of these consequences and discuss how scholars and practitioners may further examine and gain insight into these areas.

Toward this end, I orient the discussion around elements of McPhee and Zaug’s (2000/2009) four flows framework and Lewis’s (2005) “starting points” for inquiry into civil society organizations. Specifically, I examine implications for (a) *membership and lay roles/relationships* and (b) *structuring and decision-making*. This combination of scholarly works is strategic in that it (a) facilitates a comprehensive discussion of the communicative constitution of Downtown Baptist, and also (b) demonstrates the fitness of McPhee and Zaug’s framework for multiple organizational contexts including churches and other non-profits.

Membership and Lay Roles/Relationships

This first dimension of Downtown Baptist organizing deals with McPhee and Zaug’s (2000/2009) *membership negotiation* flow and corresponds to Lewis’s (2005)

attention toward volunteer relationships in non-profit organizations (NPOs). Over the course of my time at Downtown Baptist it became clear that committee members faced the most difficult task in attempting to answer the central question of membership: Who am I in relation to the organization? Similar to our understanding of NPO volunteers, many of the committee members (a) faced uncertainty about their appropriate roles and responsibilities (evident in the disparity between *congregationalist* and *rubber stamp* narratives), (b) received little if any formal training or orientation (by staff members' own admission), and (c) consequently, felt ill-equipped to make consequential decisions for the church (K. L. Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002; Pearce, 1993).

Though these lay leaders are “real members” of Downtown Baptist in the sense that they are regular attendees of church services and activities (see Ballard & Gossett, 2008), when they enter into committee service, their role changes along with the nature of their relationship with the pastoral leaders. In the capacity of committee member, they lack considerable *presence* in comparison to their pastoral advisor, and they only *temporarily* serve (maximum 3-year term) while the pastoral advisor remains permanent. Thus, according to Ballard and Gossett's (2008) typology, these individuals become more like “ghost” and/or “guest members” who lack the spatiotemporal presence and permanency to be considered “real members” in the organizational process. In this way, then, the experience of committee members in churches is similar to that of volunteers in other non-profit organizations.

Perhaps uniquely, though, these volunteers' (i.e., committee members) experiences with membership negotiation are also very much tied up in a struggle to reconcile faith and God's influence with traditional understandings of how to “run a

business.” As committee members reflect on Congregational polity which emphasizes the “priesthood of the believer” mentality as scripturally rooted and affirmed, they may see that this understanding of their role requires what K. L. Ashcraft and Kedrowicz (2002) refer to as “dominant models of empowerment” which call for “minimized hierarchy and increased responsibility and participation” (p. 105). However, like K. L. Ashcraft and Kedrowicz, I found that committee members (i.e., volunteers) viewed this brand of empowerment as “neither necessary nor necessarily empowering” (p. 105). Rather, they typically accepted the idea that they simply served as a support system for the pastorate. Hence, committee members were often conflicted on whether they should align with the latter common-sense view of their role or the “priesthood” view that is more centrally tied to faith. Thus, the issues associated with role ambiguity may be comparatively more profound for church volunteers.

Additionally, the present study sheds light on two of Lewis’s (2005) calls for inquiry into the superior-subordinate relationship in NPOs. First, it provides insight into the ways in which volunteers navigate relationships with staff supervisors. One way that committee members navigated the relationship with their pastoral advisors was through acquiescence. That is, they resigned themselves to the fact that they were going to “rubber stamp” pastoral decisions and merely “go through the motions” of a participatory democracy. In a slightly different vein, committees also navigated the relationship with pastoral advisors by conforming to their largely faith-oriented discourse and agreeably deferring to their pastoral authority.

This leads into a second question posed by Lewis (2005) that is addressed here. She asks, “What different expectations do they [volunteers and staff supervisors] have for

one another, and how are those rhetorically managed?” (p. 262). In my observations of Downtown Baptist meetings, it appears that pastoral advisors largely expect committee members to be reactive and supportive rather than proactive and adversarial. This is likely the expectation in many NPOs; however, in the case of churches, this expectation may be uniquely and powerfully reinforced as a matter of spiritual authority. Thus, the combination of pastoral expectations and committee member choices to acquiesce or conform to pastoral positions may reduce the potential for substantive conflict in committee meetings. This is an important practical concern considering the presence of this type of conflict often fosters better decisions and greater support for those decisions (K. Tracy & C. Ashcraft, 2001).

Structuring and Decision-Making

The second dimension of Downtown Baptist organizing pertains to McPhee and Zaugg’s (2000/2009) *reflexive self-structuring* flow and corresponds directly to Lewis’s (2005) emphasis on NPO governance and decision-making. This flow loses its tie to faith as Downtown Baptist members (sporadically) call upon church bylaws to make decisions and follow them by the letter of their law rather than their spirit. I use the following illustration to develop this idea. The church bylaws dictate that members may only serve on one committee at a time with a three-year term of service. This bylaw is rooted in the congregationalist value that all members should have a considerable voice in church decision-making; thus, serving in limited capacities ensures that multiple members have the opportunity to act as representatives for the congregational will. In sum, this self-structuring policy was designed to maximize member involvement in all aspects of church governance.

However, the Leadership Enlistment Committee (the body that nominates members for committee service) and pastoral advisors continue to redistribute a small set of members throughout the various committees once they complete a term of service. In other words, they follow the letter of the law by upholding the “no double-serving” and “three-year limit” rules, but they undermine the spirit of the law by rotating a small number of members throughout leadership positions. This practice ties to Lewis’s (2005) discussion of non-profit boards and the critical issue of inclusiveness in board membership. By inclusiveness, Lewis is referring to a heterogeneous composition of members who represent constituencies with varying values, priorities, and viewpoints. And while Lewis characterizes constituencies as external community groups, the same idea may be applied to Downtown Baptist’s 6,500-member congregation.

Considering that Lewis (2005) appears to endorse inclusiveness practices, she would likely be an advocate of returning to the congregationalist spirit that the committee service bylaw is rooted in. However, I found throughout my research that the decision is not so plain. In interviews, numerous participants explained that they redistribute certain members throughout committees because they are “good members” (i.e., helpful, committed) which are, at times, hard to come by. In my own observations it was clear that meeting attendance is something that many committee members find difficult. Thus, scholars who study these types of boards need to consider the consequences of inclusiveness practices.

Scholars also need to consider why some volunteers are not as “good” as others. After making a commitment to serve in these capacities, why do some members abandon their commitment? Perhaps one answer lies at the intersection of communication flows.

In the case of Downtown Baptist, there is evidence to suggest that the issue of inclusive governance (a *self-structuring* flow) is inextricably tied to the previous discussion about volunteer-staff expectations regarding their roles and responsibilities (a *membership negotiation* flow). Particularly, members may consciously or unconsciously undermine policies because of the undesirable consequences for member relationships and role expectations.

On the other hand, perhaps the answer of why “bad” committee members exist lies within the self-structuring flow itself. That is, committee members may fail to uphold their commitment of service because they grow weary of the structures and policies that dictate meeting interaction (demonstrated in the *business as usual* code and *rubber stamp* narrative). Potentially frustrating structures and policies include the fact that (a) committees must meet once a quarter whether they need to or not, and (b) chairs are selected by a Leadership Enlistment Committee that does not directly observe the committee dynamic or individual members’ capabilities. Further, the committees I observed largely lack beneficial structures to govern meeting process, monitor time, and frame and analyze problems (K. Tracy & Dimock, 2004).

In sum, congregationalist polity loses its luster as people fail to authentically embrace it and also consider the consequences of its inclusiveness. As Broadfoot et al. (2004) contend, “discourses must become grounded in everyday interaction to exert influence” (p. 196). Thus, an important consideration for practice is to consider both how the dynamics of membership expectations and governance policies may lead to the age old problem of conducting meetings viewed as, “the unfit appointed by the unwilling to

do the unnecessary” (Timm, 1997, p. 5). Further, leaders must be aware that perhaps structures need to be revisited and policies amended over time.

Study Limitations

There are three potential limitations of the present study. First, as with any case study there is always the potential that theoretical insights drawn from the research may be too “narrow and idiosyncratic” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 547) to inform future studies. With respect to church organizations, there is the additional concern that one church context is also likely drastically different than the next (particularly among churches with a congregationalist structure). Thus, the insights offered in an earlier section of this chapter (Implications for Third Sector Research and Practice) may indeed be limited as, much like scholars who study the diverse context of non-profit organizations, I “struggle[d] with questions of inclusion and generalization” (Lewis, 2005, p. 244). Despite this vulnerability, I attempted to expand the theoretical contribution of this case study by tying it to “broader theoretical issues” regarding the constitutive role of communication in organization (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 547).

The insights regarding CCO theorizing also may have been limited by a lack of data sources that are essential to fully examine the communicative constitution of an organization. Particularly, because my observations were chiefly restricted to formal organizational meetings, I did not observe many informal actions that comprise day-to-day organizational life (e.g., staff lunches, hallway conversations, impromptu meetings). Though meetings are the “bread and butter of organizational life” (K. Tracy & Dimock, 2004, p. 135), these settings likely did not provide a full account of the *activity coordination* flow of organizational constitution. Additionally, I was not invited to a

perceivably consequential meeting that regularly convened between Pastor Matthew and the Ministers of Education, Music, and Administration. This “Tier One” group, as Pastor Matthew privately referred to them, levies a considerable degree of influence in the organization; thus, by not observing their exclusive meetings, I likely missed out on a potentially significant site for organizing.

Finally, the interpretive validity of the research may be weakened by the fact that I had no additional researchers to engage toward investigator triangulation (Johnson, 1999). Campbell (1975) argues that without “separate vantage points” it is “impossible to separate the subjective and the objective component of inquiry” and, therefore, the case study findings may be mired in bias (p. 189). However, I attempted to overcome this potential risk through the use of multiple analytical procedures (narrative and discourse analysis) and several types of member checks (e.g., ongoing conversations with informants and ultimately reporting my findings back to Pastor Matthew).

Directions for Future Research

As this dissertation speaks broadly to organizational communication theory and more narrowly to faith-oriented phenomena and churches as site for research, I highlight two distinct avenues for future research and elaborate on specific directions within each. The first avenue addresses future research on the communicative constitution of organizations and proposes considerations for data collection and analysis in this vein. The second avenue for future research deals with the role of spirit-/deity-based immateriality in organizing and discusses opportunities for scholars to engage in applied research in church, faith-based, and other third sector organizational contexts.

Future CCO Research

The theoretical works subsumed under the banner of CCO have taken great strides in solidifying communication as a pivotal rather than peripheral influence on organization. And while Broadfoot et al. (2004) are right in their assertion that “no single theoretical or methodological account can provide a full understanding of organizing life” (p. 193), the ideas represented in recent works by organizational communication scholars (see Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; 2010) have greatly enhanced our understandings of the constitutive role of communication in organization. Going forth, I propose three additional directions for future research.

First, scholars must devote more attention to the methodological implications of a CCO ontology. That is, scholars need to directly engage what CCO means for collecting and analyzing data. While scholarly debate of CCO theories is necessary, we must recognize that these debates are only valuable insofar as they are grounded in and inform ongoing empirical research (Bisel, 2009; Weick, 2002). Considering that there has not been much direct attention to the methodological implications of CCO, nor is there a wealth of empirical studies explicitly tied to CCO to model from, our knowledge of how to design and engage in research from this perspective is somewhat unclear. Key questions that we must engage include: (1) What types of data are most appropriate for CCO inquiry?, and (2) What analytical processes are aligned with a CCO ontology? I address these questions by drawing from the literature to date and offering my own insights from the present study.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of CCO, the sources and types of data collected must be equally involved. Depending on the study’s

focus, multiple methods and sources of data are necessary in order to account for the interrelation among flows and the constitution of flows across time and space. Observational methods, for example, offer insight into activity coordination, but document analysis and/or interviews are needed in order to understand how other flows such as membership coordination and reflexive self-structuring affect the ongoing coordination of activity. To illustrate from my own case study research, while observational efforts afforded me the opportunity to observe activity coordination among Downtown Baptist members, my understanding of the significance and consequences of these activities would have been limited without examining organizational documents such as the Constitution and Bylaws (self-structuring and membership negotiation elements) and engaging in semi-structured interviews (elements of all four flows) (see Browning et al., 2009 for an additional exemplar of multi-method inquiry). Further, interviews and observations of multiple sources were necessary to understand the “power-ladenness of processes of activity coordination” as well as the remaining three flows (McPhee & Iverson, 2009, p. 80).

As Putnam, Nicotera, and MCPhee (2009) point out, the flows of CCO “include sensemaking and cultural regularities that favor interpretive analysis; dominance relationships, member/class identities, and resistance that align with critical analysis, and tensions and contradictions that the postmodernists examine” (p. 12). Thus, there are numerous ways in which researchers may approach the analytical task of CCO research. However, because “focusing on local, situated interactions is not enough to account for CCO”, the use of extremely micro-analytical approaches such as ethnomethodology and conversation analysis alone are not adequate for these studies (Putnam and MCPhee,

2009, p. 197). Thus, the present study used both ethnographic discursive analysis and narrative analysis to shed light on the communicative constitution of Downtown Baptist. As scholars have intimated (e.g., Taylor, 2009), narrative inquiry is particularly suited to examining the necessary roles of sensemaking, power, and temporality in organizational constitution. The narratives presented in this case study, particularly the *rubber stamp* and *separation* narratives, aptly demonstrate the suitability of this analytical method to these types of insights. However, less attention has been paid to ethnography of communication as a fitting approach to CCO inquiry. Because of its careful attention to context, temporality, and the overall “universe of discourse” that constitutes organizations and communities (Philipsen, 1992), I argue that EOC is a particularly appropriate method for CCO research and one that may potentially offer significant theoretical insight in the myriad of ways that communication constitutes organizations.

In sum, as scholars attempt to get on with empirical research as Bisel (2009) exhorts, I encourage them to consider the following in future studies: (a) multiple methods and/or sources of data are required to fully account for the complexity of coalescing flows; and (b) while numerous analytical approaches are compatible with a CCO ontology, narrative and ethnographic discursive analysis are particularly insightful analytical processes that scholars should consider in future research.

In addition to engaging the methodological dimensions of CCO more directly, scholars should devote further attention to “who” gets to speak in the organization’s communicative constitution. McPhee and Zaugg (2000/2009) contend, “while they [low power members] may see themselves as powerless to destroy or fundamentally change the organization...communication even by members low in power still does forceful

work on the constitutive task” (p. 27). However, the authors do not go into considerable detail regarding how these types of members accomplish “forceful work in the constitutive task” outside of engaging in organizational resistance. Future studies of membership negotiation and CCO should consider how spatiotemporal presence influences the degree to which members are included in constitutive flows. Ballard and Gossett’s (2008) examination of nonstandard work relationships takes strides in this direction. The *separation narrative* (chapter six) in this case study highlights the need for further examination and theorizing into the role that traditionally low status members (e.g., assistants) play in the meso-level flows (i.e., reflective self-structuring and institutional positioning) of complex organizations.

Finally, future theoretical and/or empirical works need to advance a more precise model of how material, immaterial, and human communication interrelates in organizations as entities. This study argues that human communicators draw upon these material and immaterial resources, but future studies need to better articulate this in way that retains the unique role that human communicators as agents play in the constitutive process. As the focus of this study was on the immaterial element (i.e., faith in supernatural entity), I propose some additional directions for research in this vein.

Future Immateriality and Third Sector Research

Additional case studies with multiple researchers are needed to more fully interrogate the nature and function of faith-oriented forces in the organizing process. The use of multiple researchers will help to “cross-validate, and invalidate, the other’s interpretation of the culture they had studied in common” (Campbell, 1975, p. 191). Particularly, multiple perspectives will facilitate a more critical examination of the way

that faith is used as a resource across the four flows of CCO and the implications of these various uses. For example, scholars may compare how faith is utilized in institutional positioning (e.g., presenting the organization to the community) versus membership negotiation (e.g., socializing new members) and analyze the consequences of these uses for identity formation, identification, and so forth. Scholars may also examine the differences in uses and implications of abstract (e.g., aesthetics) and faith-oriented immaterial entities.

Likewise, further inquiry into church and faith-based organizational contexts will help us understand to what extent they are similar and distinct from secular organizations in the civil society sector. For example, scholars may compare the nature and functioning of church committees with that of non-profit boards. Presumably church committees share notable similarities with non-profit boards which, as Lewis (2005) notes, “may be very strong and ruled by single-minded groups or individuals, may be weak and merely rubber stamp the decisions of staff, or may be confused and unclear about what they and the organization should be doing” (p. 255).

As this statement suggests, future studies of churches and secular non-profits may also offer mutual insight into the power-laden dimensions of both contexts (Pearce, 1993). Though the present study was not exclusively focused on issues of power, authority, and control, this is a potentially vital context for critical inquiry. Finally, another important issue in churches that is also central to third sector research is the development and maintenance of superior-subordinate relationships. As Lewis (2005) notes, “how one socializes, disciplines, appraises, directs, and forms and maintains relationships with subordinates who exist in these nebulous and oftentimes ill-defined

roles are fascinating questions” in third sector organizations (pp. 260-261). Such role ambiguities are equally endemic to congregationalist churches; thus further inquiry into these contexts may enhance our understanding of socialization, training, and supervision in third sector environments as a whole.

Finally, this case study also points to churches and faith-based organizations as vital sites for applied communication research. After reflecting on my time at Downtown Baptist, I propose that we reexamine the relationship between *who* we are as qualitative researchers and *what* we are doing in third sector organizational contexts. At this point, most scholars concur on “who” we are as researchers. Qualitative researchers do not merely conduct research. Rather, they serve as the research instruments, making discoveries and gathering insight with and among our participants (Cheney, 2000; Janesick, 2000). Thus, qualitative inquiry is a delicate process that largely requires trust on the part of the participants and sensitivity on the part of the researcher. These considerations should already be salient for most qualitative researchers as they enter into third sector organizational contexts. What is not entirely clear, though, is the question of “what” qualitative researchers should be doing in these types of contexts. Beyond the presumable and vital objective of making theoretically significant insights into organizational phenomena, is there any additional responsibility that qualitative scholars have to the organizations and members they study?

Eisenberg and Eschenfelder (2009) emphasize the “important applied communication agendas within these [third sector] organizations” (p. 375), and scholars are increasingly speaking up about the academy’s failure in general to offer practical insight to organizations and communities (e.g., Frey, 2009; Greenwood and Levin, 2003).

In line with this thought, I contend that qualitative researchers, at the very least, should consider how they might contribute to the third sector organizations that they study. If we truly embrace the idea that communication is not just an element but constitutive of organizations, our field is particularly well positioned to help these organizational actors function more productively and ethically. One way in which scholars may do this is by engaging in what Frey (2009) refers to as *interventional scholarship*. As opposed to *translational scholarship* which adapts previously conducted academic research for practitioners and lay audiences (e.g., articles featured in the practitioner-friendly online journal, *Communication Currents*), interventional scholarship enfolds applied work into the scholarly process of data collection and analysis. That is, researchers take a first person perspective on research by “intervening into discourses to affect them and documenting their practices, processes, and products” (Frey, 2009, pp. 209-210; see also, Frey & Carragee, 2007).

As I think back over my fieldwork and how an interventional approach may have influenced both the organization and my scholarly insights, two events come to mind. The first event centers on my ongoing observation of weekly pastoral staff meetings. In the previous two meetings I attended, I had already noticed that the tentative agenda was often derailed by the lack of a clear facilitator, no formal agenda document to reference back to, and the overall climate of openness and informality. In this meeting, though, the derailing reached new heights as a miscellaneous question about the content of a Sunday morning announcement devolved into an hour long debate about the criteria events must meet for inclusion into the worship announcements. For 60 minutes I observed pastors

talk past each other, backtrack to prior conversations, engage in side conversations, hurl sarcasms, and become visibly frustrated at their own inefficiencies.

The second event transpired at a committee meeting that, in part, addressed the church's financial circumstances. In essence, I silently watched the committee chair entirely misrepresent the Finance Committee's and pastors' positions on the financial situation. For example, though each group had continually expressed a desire to be open and transparent about the church's financial status, the chairperson said it was a "confidential" matter. Likewise, though the Finance Committee had merely asked each committee to brainstorm potential contingency strategies to cut their budget, the chairperson informed the committee members that they had been "told they had to cut something no matter what." Consequently, the entire committee became enraged at the perceived ultimatum and spent the remainder of their meeting arguing about committee jurisdiction.

For each event I wonder: What if I had intervened? What if I had facilitated the pastoral conversation with basic principles of conflict negotiation? What if I had provided the committee with accurate facts before they became consumed with anger toward an illusory mandate? In the former situation, I might have helped the pastors work through a situation that even they grew weary from, and in the latter situation I might have prevented a destructive conflict and the resulting implications that reached beyond that single day. And in each case I may have gathered meaningful data about how the members adjusted (or failed to adjust) in this process of activity coordination.

Admittedly, as we entertain these methodological choices in future studies, at least two concerns must be considered. First, as the relationship between the researcher

and the researched is blurred, there are ethical concerns about “burning the field” or incurring irrevocable damage on your site and/or participants (Punch, 1986).

Additionally, some scholars might be concerned that practical intervention may come at the expense of scholarly insight. However, I take Greenwood and Levin’s (2003) position that there is a false dichotomy of the difference between pure and applied research. In my view, if you are attuned to these concerns, it is well worth the effort to consider how you may engage with your participants in a more interventional way.

Non-profit organizations are particularly fitting for these efforts because these organizations often admittedly lack the necessary resources, knowledge, and skills to improve their communication processes; further, the leaders of these organizations are often open if not begging for intervention. In my own experience, Pastor Matthew readily acknowledged that he had no idea how lay leaders felt regarding committee structures, processes of decision-making, or expectations of the staff and lay leader relationship nor did he understand how to effectively engage in these conversations.

At the same time, he and the other pastors desired greatly to improve their organizational deficiencies, and they were very open to learning how they might do so. As Pastor Matthew acknowledged, “We’re not business people but we can and need to learn from business ideas.” Downtown Baptist’s situation is emblematic of many churches, for as Barna (1998) states, “the systems, structures, institutions, and relational networks developed for the furtherance of the Church are archaic, inefficient, and ineffective – and perhaps, even unbiblical. Our problem, then is not theological but practical in nature” (p. 7). Communication scholars are particularly equipped to engage

these practical problems, but we must reconsider our orientation toward the researcher role in future studies.

An Epilogue of Dual Identities

As I conclude, I am still beset by my two identities. The scholar in me offered some answers to the questions that guided this study. This dissertation provides a rich description of the various faith-oriented discourses that pervade a church organization (e.g., *keep the faith* code and *spiritual authority* narrative). Additionally, I identified the landscape of non-faith oriented discourses that equally inform Downtown Baptist organizing (e.g., *secular thinking* code and *rubber stamp* narrative). In some settings these discourses may be harmonious, while others exist in tension, largely because the experiences and viewpoints in church organizing are as varied as the types of members who take part in the process. And while unique in their own right, I found that churches face many of the same challenges as third sector organizations. Thus, future scholars and practitioners may learn a great deal from both contexts.

On the other hand, the believer in me is still consumed by questions. Who will be the next pastor to exploit someone in the name of God? How did the “priesthood of the believer” transform into the “assembly of the rubber stamper”? What is the line between “church” and “business,” or is there is even a line at all? And finally, how does God even “speak” in this day and age? For most of these questions, I still have few answers. But on the last question, I am content – both as a scholar and a believer. To me, the answer lies in the simple words of a song: *My God’s not dead. He’s surely alive, and He’s living on*

*the inside, roaring like a lion.*⁵ The challenge for organizing, though, is that human actors must “write” and “direct” this roar (see Crable, 1990).

⁵ Excerpt from “Like a Lion”, lyrics by Daniel Bashta

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Site Approval Letter

October 19, 2009

Dr. Jody Jensen, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
The University of Texas at Austin
P.O. Box 7426
Austin, TX 78713
irbchair@austin.utexas.edu

Dear Dr. Jensen:

The purpose of this letter is to grant Lacy McNamee, a doctoral student researcher at the University of Texas at Austin, permission to conduct her dissertation research at _____ Baptist Church in _____, Texas. The dissertation project, "Organizing the Ineffable: The Communicative Constitution of a Faith-Based Organization" entails Mrs. McNamee observing regularly-scheduled organizational meetings among the church staff and leaders (e.g., committee members, deacons). Additionally, Mrs. McNamee will arrange to individually interview each consenting participant during the 5-month data collection process.

I acknowledge that _____ participants will be assured of their rights to privacy and confidentiality, and I understand that these rights will be secured, in part, by obtaining the written consent of each participant. I also understand that _____ staff/leaders will not be financially compensated for their participation and may withdraw from the study at any time. Mrs. McNamee and I have negotiated which meetings she may observe. She will be introduced at meetings, and she will have the opportunity to obtain consent from willing participants at this time. Mrs. McNamee will be solely responsible for arranging interviews with each participant, and I understand that each interview participant may determine a preferred interview location. I also grant permission for interviews to be conducted at the church.

I Rev. _____, do hereby grant permission for Lacy McNamee to conduct "Organizing the Ineffable: The Communicative Constitution of a Faith-Based Organization" at _____.

Sincerely,

Rev. _____
Senior Pastor
_____ Baptist Church
_____, Texas

Appendix B: Subject Consent Form

Title: Organizing the Ineffable: The Communicative Constitution of a Faith-Based Organization

IRB PROTOCOL # 2009-07-0026

CONDUCTED BY: Lacy G. McNamee	Larry D. Browning, Ph.D.
Doctoral Student	Faculty Sponsor
Dept. of Comm. Studies	Dept of Comm. Studies
University of Texas at Austin	University of Texas at Austin
(254) 498-1730	(512) 471-1931
lurbantke@mail.utexas.edu	lbrowning@mail.utexas.edu

This form asks for your participation in a research study and provides you with information about it. Please read this information and feel free to ask the researcher any pertinent questions before deciding whether to participate. As your participation is entirely voluntary, you may refuse or withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or consequence to your relationships with UT Austin or _____ Baptist Church. To do so, simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your personal records.

The purpose of this study is to examine the communication of employees and leaders in a faith-based organization (FBO). Specifically, this study will examine three issues associated with working in a faith-based organization. First, this research seeks to identify how FBO employees/leaders discuss and rationalize organizational decisions, actions, and priorities. Second, this research seeks to examine how FBO employees/leaders are socialized into (i.e., learn about) working in a faith-based organization. Third, this research seeks to understand how individual employees/leaders experience or perceive their faith-based organizational life (e.g., experienced as a job, a calling, etc.).

If you agree to take part in this study, you may participate in one or both of the following ways:

Observation: This is an ethnographic study wherein the researcher observes employee/leader interaction, chiefly in the context of meetings. As a participant in the observational portion of the study you will not be asked to do anything outside of your normal organizational activities (i.e., conducting the business of your regularly scheduled meetings). *Assuming that all members in a particular meeting are agreeable to the researcher's presence, she will watch and take notes during the meeting as a detached observer. In no way will the researcher intervene or inject herself into the meeting process.*

Audio-taped observations: Occasionally, the researcher may also request to audio-record a meeting for the purpose of close, linguistic analysis. *The researcher will only audio-record a meeting when there is unanimous consent among the members present.*

Interviews: The second phase of this study will involve semi-structured interviews. As a

participant in this portion of the study, you will be interviewed individually at a predetermined time and place of your choosing. The researcher will ask you questions, for example, about (a) how you became a leader/employee of a faith-based organization and/or (b) important or defining experiences that you've faced during your time in the organization. Interviews will be audio-recorded unless otherwise requested by the participant.

The duration of this study will occur over a 5-month period (approximately October 2009 - March 2010). During this time, you will be contacted prior to your meeting if the researcher will be in attendance. If you agree to be interviewed, you will be interviewed only once for approximately 30-60 minutes.

Risks associated with taking part in this study are minimal. Such minimal risks include:

- Loss of confidentiality of responses (Note: see "Assurance of confidentiality and privacy" below for complete information on the steps taken to avoid this risk).
- Organizational consequences for legal/financial impropriety. That is, if the researcher witnesses illegal activity during her observations, she is obliged to report it to the necessary authorities.

There are no physical risks associated with participating in this study. If you wish to discuss the risks listed above or the potential for any other unforeseen risks, you may contact Lacy McNamee at the phone number and email listed at the top of this form.

Benefits of participating in this study include learning more about the communication dynamics of your unique organization. At the end of this study, the researcher will present a summary of her findings and recommendations to you and the rest of the study participants. For example, based on her research, the researcher may provide strategies for how employees/leaders can be more effectively socialized into the organization so that they have a positive work experience (Note: There is no financial compensation for participating in this study).

Assurance of confidentiality and privacy. In order to maintain complete privacy and confidentiality, the researcher has implemented positive procedures to protect against any loss or breach of these rights. Under no conditions will these protections be compromised. *Pertaining to privacy in general*, the researcher will preliminarily negotiate which meetings she may attend – i.e., she will not "drop in" unannounced. Additionally, at any point during an observed meeting, you may ask the researcher to leave the room. *Pertaining to privacy during interviews*, you have the liberty to determine when and at what location you prefer to be interviewed. The researcher is obligated to provide a private setting in which anything discussed is shared only between the researcher and participant. During the interview, you may refuse to answer any questions. You also have the option to terminate the interview and withdraw your participation from the study at any time.

Pertaining to confidentiality, you will not be audio-recorded in any capacity unless you provide prior consent. Any audio-recorded files, fieldnotes, and transcripts of

interviews/meetings will be coded so that no personally identifying information is listed. Files and transcripts will be locked securely in the researcher's office, and data will be used for research purposes only. Only the authorized researcher, doctoral review committee, and Institutional Review Board at UT Austin have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. In the event that this research will be published, you will be notified prior to publication, and any publications will exclude information that will make it possible to identify you or your organization as participants.

Contacts and Questions: If you have questions, desire additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation, please contact the principal investigator (Lacy McNamee). Her phone number and e-mail address are listed at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant or wish to report complaints, concerns, or questions about this research please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair of The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (512) 232-2685 or irbchair@austin.utexas.edu. You may also contact the Office of Research Support at (512) 471-8871 or orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I initialed the individual aspects of participation that I consent to (please initial in the provided space):

I consent to being observed at organizational meetings _____

I consent to being interviewed on a one-time basis _____

Signature of Participant:

Date:

Signature of Investigator:

Date:

Appendix C: Summary of Meetings Observed

Pastoral Staff Meetings:

Meeting Type	Meeting Frequency	Members Present	Purpose and Structure
Full Staff	weekly	8-10 ^a of 10	Recurrent meeting wherein pastors share ministry announcements, discuss church-wide affairs (e.g., finances), and receive tasks/assignments for the week (e.g., individual responsibilities during Sunday worship services); meetings facilitated by Administrative Pastor Walter but largely informal norms of interaction
Education Staff	monthly	4 of 4	Newly established monthly meeting wherein Education, Children's, Youth, and College ministers convene to share ministry news and report on tasks delegated by Education Minister (e.g., annual goals); meeting facilitated by Education Minister Joe with an organized but informal climate of interaction

Ministry Support Staff Meetings:

Meeting Type	Meeting Frequency	Members Present	Purpose and Structure
Recreation staff	sporadic ^b	8 of 12	Share staff-wide announcements, provide feedback regarding ministry programs and share employee experiences with those programs; facilitated by Recreation Associate Emily (in the absence of Recreation and Missions Minister Martin) and interaction was extremely informal (e.g., employees carried on side conversations while meeting business took place)
Childcare staff	weekly	7-8 ^a of 8	Collaborate on and delegate responsibilities regarding ministry tasks, programs, and challenges; meeting facilitated by Children's Minister Tricia in an organized but largely democratic climate of interaction
College staff	weekly	5 of 6	Plan and delegate tasks for the Wednesday night college service and gathering; facilitated by College Minister Austin but solicited feedback and ideas from staff members

Ministry Support Volunteer Meetings:

Meeting Type	Meeting Frequency	Members Present	Purpose and Structure
College volunteers	sporadic	10 of 20	College minister shared idea for new ministry and outreach program, discussed role that volunteers may potentially play in implementing the program, and sought feedback regarding the proposed program; facilitated by College Minister Austin with limited verbal participation or interruption from other attendees

Deacons Meetings:

Meeting Type	Meeting Frequency	Members Present	Purpose and Structure
Deacons	monthly ^c	29-35 ^a of 100 ^d	largely functions as a social gathering for edification and testimony; also used for information sharing and feedback between deacon fellowship and pastoral staff; facilitated by Deacon Chair Peter, beginning with a dinner and followed by a more formally structured meeting

Church-Wide Business Meetings:

Meeting Type	Meeting Frequency	Members Present	Purpose and Structure
Church-wide business	monthly ^c	150-200 ^a (approx.)	Reports given by Finance Committee Chair and various other committee chairs and ministry advisors; vote on church business matters (e.g., accepting new members); facilitated by Pastor Matthew and conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order.

Committee Meetings:

Meeting Type	Meeting Frequency	Members Present	Purpose and Structure
Building and Grounds	quarterly ^c	7	Share information and delegate responsibilities for church maintenance; formally facilitated by lay leader chair but informally influenced by Administrative Pastor Peter; climate was distant but courteous
Children's	quarterly	8	Discuss needs and challenges facing the ministry; provide feedback and evaluation to children's ministry staff regarding

			programming and staff performance; facilitated by lay leader chair
Finance	quarterly	7-8 ^a	Review and approve expenditures and develop budget for fiscal year; formally facilitated by lay leader chair but informally influenced by Administrative Pastor Peter; climate is professional and informally uses Robert's Rules of Order to conduct meeting business
Leadership Enlistment	quarterly	6	Nominate lay members for service on standing committees; facilitated by lay leader chair; climate is professional and informally uses Robert's Rules of Order to conduct meeting business
Missions	quarterly	7	Develop opportunities for members to participate in ministry and delegate responsibilities to promote missions; facilitated by lay leader chair and features a formal and distant but courteous climate
Personnel	quarterly	7-8 ^a	Develop ways to be responsible with personnel finances; conduct annual evaluations of pastoral staff; facilitated by lay leader chair and informally uses Robert's Rules of Order to Conduct meeting business
Senior Adults	quarterly	7	Collaborate to develop social and spiritual programs for senior members; delegate responsibilities for these programs; facilitated by lay leader chair and meeting business conducted rather informally
Youth	quarterly	8	Advise youth minister on program planning and delegate responsibilities to support youth programs; facilitated by lay leader chair and conducted rather informally

^aNumbers in attendance vary across meetings

^bIs not a standing meeting; convened at the discretion of the staff advisor.

^cThe Constitution and Bylaws states that these meetings should convene on a monthly basis, but these groups met less frequently during the period of data collection.

^dThere are approximately 100 deacons formally enlisted in the Deacon Fellowship though many of these do not actively participate in monthly deacon meetings.

^eWhile some committees met only quarterly, others (e.g., Finance) met on a more regular basis.

Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Question Schedule for Pastoral and Support Staff:

Socialization to Organizational Environment and Job/Role

How long have you been with Downtown Baptist?

What led you to take a job in a church?

What did you think it would be like?

Before DB did you have any experience working for a church?

How did this shape your perceptions of what DB would be like?

Did you have any previous connection to DB (i.e., membership, service)?

How did this shape your perception of what it would be like to work for the church?

What led you to this particular job or vocation?

Did you have any skills/training for this job? How has this helped – if at all?

How did you find out about the DB job?

Were you interviewed for your job?

What was this process like?

Organizational Discourses and Decision-Making

What responsibilities are included in your formal job description?

What does an average day at your job entail?

What standards/processes/policies do you use to make these decisions?

Who do you consult in order to make decisions?

What is one of the hardest decisions you've ever had to make in your job?

How did you go about making this decision?

Compare yourself to...

Your colleagues: How do you make decisions differently/similarly than them?

Professionals outside of FBOs: What's different/unique about the way that they make decisions – if at all?

If you were to explain what church work is like to an outsider, what would you say?

What tips would you give a new employee?

In your opinion, does the church abide by a lot of rules, policies, etc?

Do they even have them? Do they break them?

How does god/faith/prayer influence the decisions that are made?

How does this work with church policies? In tandem? In contradiction?

In your opinion, what is the mission of the church?

How have the staff/leaders performed at furthering this mission?

How have the staff/leaders performed at communicating this mission?

Question Schedule for Lay Leaders:

Socialization to Lay Leader Service

How long have you been with DB?

How long have you served in this particular role? Any previous leadership roles?

Tell me about how you were contacted about this position.

Who asked you to consider this role? How was it described to you?

Did you receive any training or initiation into your role?

Did you feel prepared to fulfill the responsibilities of your role?

Have you had any friends/family involved in lay leader or staff roles?

What were your expectations about the role?

How has your experience matched or contradicted these expectations?

Organizational Discourses and Decision-Making

What is one of the hardest decisions your committee (or leader body) has had to make?

How did you go about making this decision?

Compare yourself to...

Other lay leaders on your committee: How do you make decisions differently/similarly than them?

Your staff advisor: Do you make decisions similarly or differently? Explain.

When the time comes, what tips would you give to your committee replacement?

What standards/processes/policies do you use to make decisions in your lay leader role?

In your opinion, does the church abide by a lot of rules, policies, etc?

Do they even have them? Do they break them?

How does god/faith/prayer influence the way you make decisions?

How does this influence the way that others make decisions?

How does this work with church policies? In tandem? In contradiction?

What is your greatest frustration about committee / lay leader service?

In your opinion, what is the mission of the church?

How have the staff/leaders performed at furthering this mission?

How have the staff/leaders performed at communicating this mission?

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