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# A First Step Toward Assessing Organizational Identification In A University Setting

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A FIRST STEP TOWARD ASSESSING ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION IN A  
UNIVERSITY SETTING

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by

Didier Hernandez Bizouarn

2011

## **Dedication**

To Annick, Jose Luis, and Bruno, who unconditionally stand by me.

A FIRST STEP TOWARD ASSESSING ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION IN A  
UNIVERSITY SETTING

by

DIDIER HERNANDEZ BIZOUARN,

BA in Communication (Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua)

THESIS

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I deeply appreciate the support of my dear friend and colleague, Sunay Palsole (who I hope to call doctor soon), and for keeping me always on my toes.

Lastly, I offer my outmost appreciation and blessings to all of those who supported me in any respect during the completion of the project. My friends who never doubted me, and always encouraged me to never lose focus ... always encouraged me to "get it done!"

## **Abstract**

Organizational culture research has been steadily growing during the last two decades, and has become an essential component for assessing an organization's capacity to adapt and survive. Discovering the underlying assumptions within an organization offers a more accurate insight on how its members perceive, think, and feel about the environment they work in, thus providing the opportunity of assessing the group's cohesiveness and culture strength. This study was designed to establish an initial assessment of an organization within a university setting, and to provide insight to its membership sense of identification. The study reflects the analysis of different information made available through visible artifacts, as well as perceptions from its members via a self-identification questionnaire.

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## **Introduction**

At the center of this research is the Distance Education Support group (DES) in a southwestern U.S. university campus (university hereafter). This study will focus on its organizational structure and culture. It will explore possible themes or elements that can provide insight into how the individuals working there perceive their own culture. Ideally, the study will address the culture strength perception, and do an initial assessment of what occurs within DES' organizational culture. Schein (1984) describes what organizational culture is and writes about understanding an organization's pattern of basic assumptions and going deeper into what are the collections of individual perceptions and how they influence the way the organization functions and behaves as a collective unit. To do this, Schein differentiates between those underlying perceptions from individuals in the organization and what he calls visible artifacts that define the processes and policies in place for such an organization to work at a basic level. Examples of this, in DES, would be the course development process, student handbook of operations, documenting procedures, and overall workflow. These are visible artifacts that can be tracked at any moment.

My interest in researching DES organizational culture was born out of a personal interest to find out more about a relatively new organization's behavior in a higher education environment. It is surely a subject worth researching about first hand. From a communication theory perspective, I believe it makes it more interesting when such an organization focuses on instructional technology to promote the enhancement of learning.

DES' current stronghold is its focus on the promotion and expansion of online learning as the distance education arm of the university. As its name suggests, it provides services to support instruction enhanced with the use of technology or mediated teaching. To further understand what this means, we need to cover some key concepts related to DES' line of work.

Online learning, online education, distance learning, and web-based instruction are a few terms referring to the way in which the teaching and learning experience is, in most part, offered through media. This is in contrast to traditional brick and mortar classroom teaching. In this university's case, the state administrative code provides a definition of what the term Distance Education means: "The formal educational process that occurs when students and instructors are not in the same physical setting for the majority (more than 50 percent) of instruction (state administrative code, 2010)." Courses falling within this definition's umbrella are of two types: Fully Distance Education Courses, which entail face-to-face contact time between learners and instructors of no more than 15%; and Hybrid/Blended Courses that provide more than 50% of instruction without face-to-face meetings but no more than 85%.

Instructional Design is another term utilized within DES. It refers to the implementation of technology to make the instruction process as effective as possible. Instructional design is part of the support and development of the current online learning processes at the university. Mediated teaching, building on the definition of distance education and instructional design, covers the integration of media to enhance instruction.

To research how DES works, this study will need to go back in time and look at its conception. As an organization, DES is part of a larger structure within the university's institutional hierarchy. DES' umbrella structure is the department of Services for Instructional Technology Support (SITS). SITS is part of the group of entities managed by one of the Vice Presidents at the university responsible for the planning and management of information resources (VP-C hereafter).

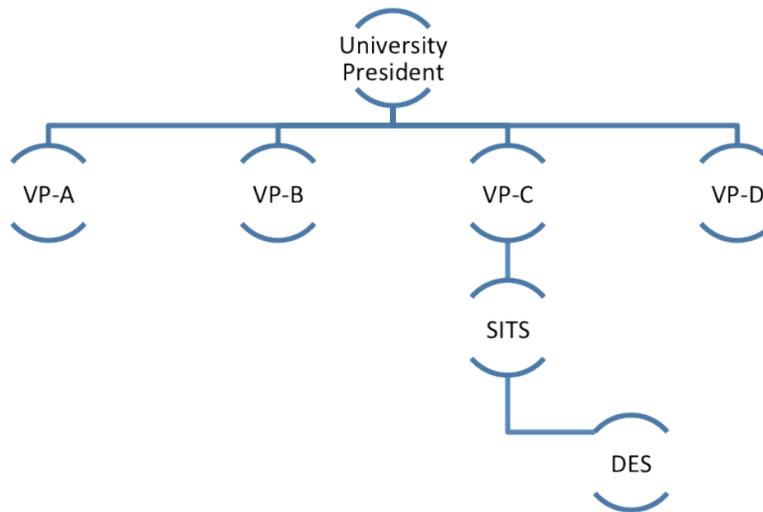


Figure 1. Institutional chart showing DES organizational position

The VP-C is the larger entity in which SITS and DES are embedded. It centralizes the management and support of information resources for the university, which means it is responsible for the attainment, storage, processing and diffusion of information to benefit its students, faculty, and administrative personnel in the areas of research, planning, and instruction. Technology support and infrastructure is managed via VP-C, as well as other university information gatekeepers like the library and institutional data gathering/evaluation centers. Looking to assist with the integration of instructional technology information, SITS collaborates with academic departments to achieve their goals.

SITS was created in 2004 and, at the time, it included the Center for Digital Media (CDM) that would later evolve into DES. The CDM cannot be considered the predecessor to DES per se, because the type of work was never similar in nature. Online learning was something that began very slowly at SITS. The current director of Instructional Development manages DES and led the restructuring of the organization to focus on online learning. He stated that online learning was a small part of what the department did at the time (late 90's and early 2000's). Later on online learning grew to become one of SITS's main services.

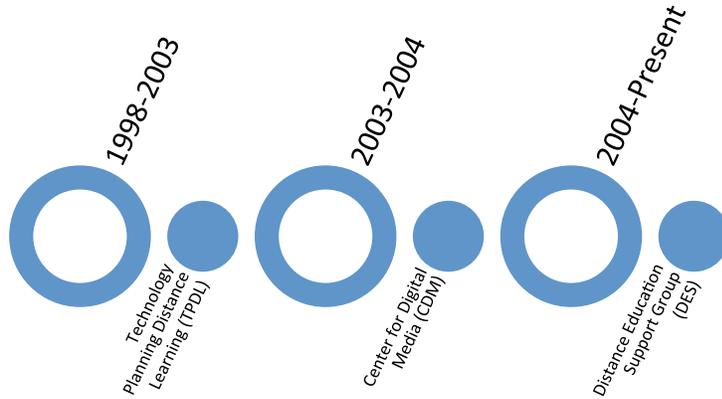


Figure 2. Distance Education Support Timeline

The Sloan Consortium’s latest survey about online education in the US (2010-2011) shows increasing numbers of students taking online courses. 31% of higher education students are taking at least one course online. Since 2004, DES has shown considerable growth in the distance/online learning area. From a handful of courses initially developed, DES has worked with faculty to provide more than 300 online courses for students to benefit from to complete their higher education. These numbers are reflective of a trend across the US with regards to online learning, and how institutions view this format as a necessary investment rather than an option. This increasing trend in offerings has also promoted internal organizational growth to help address the demand for support. From less than five individuals back in 2004, DES currently employs more than 30 staff and student employees to meet the design, redesign, development, support, and innovation challenges online learning brings to its doors. During the restructuring and growth process, DES refined its role to better align with the university's mission. Procedures and workflows were developed to provide more clarity as to what the role of DES would become after the restructuring process. This restructuring process was geared to develop a stronger organizational structure that would focus on aligning to the university’s mission and vision. The mission at DES is similar to the mission of SITS (SITS website, 2011), which is to:

- Provide students with appropriate opportunities to participate in the various university study programs through the use of technology-based media and methods for the delivery of instruction.
- Serve as the campus focal point for planning and policy development in the areas of on-line distributed and asynchronous delivery of instruction tied to technology-based systems.

The staff and students working at DES are divided into different areas that support each other's work. Graphic and media developers, as well as software programmers integrate DES to meet the different projects involving instruction and technology. Students comprise the Web Developer workforce, and focus on putting together all the elements of the instructional design set forth by the Multimedia Specialists and Instructional Consultants, who are full time staff members. Both of these share the responsibility of managing and designing the instructional content facilitated by the instructors of each of the each developed course. Within the process, there are also Graphic Designers and Media Developers that contribute to enhance the design of the content. These too are student positions. Together, the DES collaborates at different levels to ensure a successful design and development of online instructional content.

With access to visible artifacts (Schein, 1984) and participation in the underlying assumptions within the DES organizational culture, this study looks to assess the strength of such culture and attempt to provide insight on how a higher education organization behaves.

## Literature Review

Organizational culture research has been steadily growing during the last two decades (Giberson et al., 2009). Hofstede (1990) provides an insightful statement on the background of organizational culture theory. He references the integration of "pep talks, war stories, and insightful case studies" (pp. 286-287). Hofstede's reference is important because he goes on to state that the basic studies of organizational culture were modeled after a comparative study between national cultures (1990, p. 287). Adler (2007) describes how organizations, in order to expand globally, need to be successful in addressing the national culture of a place. There is large interest, especially at the corporate level, in increasing the body of knowledge to improve efficiency in organizations. Through trial and error, big companies such as IBM, McDonalds, and General Electric have worked hard to establish a solid organizational culture that has allowed them to be successful in a multinational world (Deal & Kennedy, 1983). As an example, McDonald's continues its expansion across the globe by carefully integrating its corporate culture into local and regional environments. Lassar and Kulkarni (2008) review the long process McDonald's followed to ensure its presence in India, a country that doesn't precisely fit the meat-consuming model like in the U.S.

Organizational culture can be heavily influenced by the national culture that surrounds it. Researchers like Hofstede have brought up the importance of mentioning, comparing, or scaling an organization's culture to a larger national one (1985, 1990). The comparison, one can say, is inevitable since culture plays an inherent role in human nature and group dynamics. Deal and Kennedy (2000) point out that understanding human nature is key to making sense of the surrounding environment. It does not matter if it is at work or anywhere else; the study of culture from a sociological and anthropological perspective has been used to further the research into organizational culture theory. Denison and Mishra (1995) cite the relationship between culture and how social organizations function to provide a stronger focus on organizational culture and effectiveness. Schein himself (1984), in his

definition of organizational culture explains how cultural paradigms are created to help “tie together the basic assumptions about human kind, nature, and activities” (p. 3). These models turn cultural artifacts into coherent sequences or patterns that provide order and consistency.

The concept of culture is essential to how research on organizations can be conducted and expanded. It can provide a path to assess what it means for an organization to possess a strong culture, thus allowing the possibility for its existence and survival. Being part of a university, DES’ organizational culture is inevitably influenced by the larger organizational culture. Furthermore, the type of organization also plays a role in the research process. In this case, the context of the research will define the organization as a smaller unit of individuals in a university setting rather than a larger corporation; or even at a national identity level. Trice and Beyer (1984) do a wonderful job of bringing together different definitions of culture in the context of an organization. Combining Pettigrew and Beyer’s definition of culture (1979,1981) they concluded culture has two basic components: “(1) its substance, or the networks of meanings contained in its ideologies, norms, and values; and (2) its forms, or the practices whereby these meanings are ex-pressed, affirmed, and communicated to members” (p. 654).

Researchers are consistent in including in their definition of organizational culture shared beliefs and experiences by the organization members (Peterson & Spencer, 1990, 1994; Tierney, 1988; Smart & St. John 1996). Moreover, Schein (1984) has a more layered explanation of what constitutes studying an organization’s culture. He carefully analyzes his definition and provides a series of elements that will contribute to this specific research:

Organizational culture is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, and developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 3).

This definition comes from an attempt to develop a frameset that gives a more dynamic approach as to how we study organizational communication. Schein states that we need to dig deeper and look at the underlying elements that are not visible or tangible in the way an organization works. He begins by referring to a pattern of basic assumptions as a combination of elements he defines as visible artifacts, the values, and the basic preconscious assumptions that will determine how members of the organization perceive, think, and feel. The visible artifacts are those organizational components that can be available internally and externally, and make the organization work. These are tangible elements such as work place, workflows, policies, and technology. Livari and Huisman (2007) refers to them as “artifacts such as the visible and audible patterns of the culture” (p. 36). The values refer to the projected behaviors individuals perceive to be ideal within the organization. Both define these values and beliefs to be concerned as to “what ought to be done.”

Organizational culture researchers and theorists, in general, do seem to concur that the study of an organization and its behavior involves a layered approach. These layers are addressed differently based on their approach or focus, but there seems to be common elements in the way culture is studied. Livari and Huisman (2007) approach organizational culture in a broad perspective and define it to be construed to cover almost every aspect of the organization. This broad approach can imply that to study an organization’s culture, one would have to look at every component that integrates it. Now, it is important to point out as well that researchers also promote a generic model for studying organizational culture. This situation, more than to show a lack of consensus, can be considered as responsible or healthy skepticism to prevent a cookie-cutter approach to studying a particular organization (Denison & Mishra, 1995).

Every workplace has its organizational culture, and many times when it is a large organization, it has many cultures within it (Coomer, 2007). During the last decade, researchers have been polishing their work to find consistency and improve organizational productivity (Fralinger & Olson, 2007). They

build upon Schein's definition of organizational culture and further the idea of looking at the "underlying assumptions" he proposes. To understand an organization's culture, we need to dig deeper and go beyond what Schein calls "visible artifacts" and look at how individuals in an organization "perceive, think, and feel" (Schein, 1984). This approach, of course, does not mean to undermine those visible artifacts that show the tangible nature of the organization. These are essential to addressing the way individuals perceive, think, and feel within the environment they work in. These visible artifacts refer to processes, policies, and available technologies that the organization needs to perform its everyday functions.

Looking into an organization's culture and its underlying assumptions is usually done to assess and learn how an organization's behavior can influence its effectiveness and maintain higher chances of survival (Schein, 1992; Smart & St. John, 1996). Deal and Kennedy (1982, 2000) write about the elements of culture and how they develop into a strong culture that will contribute to the organization's survival. Schein (1984) also touches upon the concept of cultural strength by proposing that an organization's cultural strength can be defined by the "homogeneity and stability of group membership" and "the length and intensity of shared experiences of the group" (p. 7). Deal and Kennedy's elements of culture involve the business environment, the values, heroes, and rituals or ceremonials. These are presented as core components of a strong organizational culture and are similar to what other proponents of strong culture advance (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Denison, 1984). These elements are part of the layered study of organizational culture and help bring importance to what makes a culture strong. Deal and Kennedy (1983) define values to be the soul of an organization, and suggest that rituals and ceremonies provide a milieu and "tangible opportunities for values to be reinforced, heroes to be celebrated, and symbols to be displayed and exchanged" (p. 14). Similarly, Hackman and Johnson (2009) divide organizational culture into three levels: assumptions, values, and symbols; which reinforce the layered approach to organizational culture research.

Smart and St. John (1996) examine the relation between an organization's culture and effectiveness through analyzing the types of culture, and also define what strong culture means. They define strong cultures as "those in which there is congruence between espoused beliefs and actual practices, whereas weak cultures are characterized by incongruence between espoused beliefs and actual practices (p. 223). Cameron and Freeman (1991) also define cultural strength and provide a sustainable review on organizational culture research. They distinguish, in reviewing one of the different approaches to organizational culture (Sathe, 1983; Schall, 1983; Schein, 1984), between culture strength and culture congruence. The first focuses on the power of the culture to establish, as Schein states it, homogeneity. The latter addresses how the various elements in the culture integrate and fit together. Apart from strength and congruence, there are other ways of approaching organizational culture.

Cameron and Ettington's review (1988) provides a great foundation for researchers trying to find ways to assess organizational culture. From Albert and Wetten's holographic versus ideographic cultures (1985) to Deal and Kennedy's 4 emerging types of culture, researchers have come up with a variety of instruments to measure culture and its characteristics within an organization.

Organizational identification (March & Simon, 1958) will be considered in this research to provide insight to how individuals develop a relationship with the organizations they are a part of. How strong a person feels about an organization and leadership influences his or her identity internally and externally. Wiesenfeld et al. (1998) emphasized that strong identification is determinant in how an organization behaves, adapts, and survives. Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) state that identification "is in the process of emerging identity" (p. 304), and we can find indicators of it in the context of interactions and language within the organization. Hackman and Johnson (2009) also agree that language can provide a snapshot of how members in an organization view themselves by paying close attention to the words they use. Words like "we are" or "we need to" might point to closeness between individuals and the organization. Strong identification with the organization will likely have members

"think and act in terms of this group membership" (van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000). Riketta (2003) defines organizational identification as the "congruence of individual and organizational values" (p. 360). Wiesenfeld, Raghuram and Garud (1998) emphasize that strong identification is determinant in how an organization behaves, adapts, and survives.

This study attempts to focus on the underlying assumptions within DES. This attempt means that I will be looking to provide some ground that will allow me to perform an assessment of what the individuals working there think, perceive, and feel. To do so, I have to be more specific in the literature we look for and try to find similar studies that can serve as guides to answer my questions. For that reason, I address the concept of organizational culture and its strength within a higher education environment. As stated in this literature review, the business environment in which the culture exists can heavily influence the way it behaves (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, 2000). DES is part of the university, which possesses a culturally diverse body of students, faculty, and staff members. The university's geographical location contributes to such diversity. Located in the border region between two countries, the university has a large community of Mexican and Mexican-American students and staff. DES reflects such demographics and probably influences its organizational culture. The current economic situation might be something that affects how the organization behaves if its own survival is threatened. Continuing on with the environment, DES works within an educational setting. This means it adapts, in this case, to a higher education environment with its rigors and flexibilities.

Deal and Kennedy (1983) promote a strong school culture to address productivity. Smart and St. John (1996) argue that organizational culture research in higher education has been widely studied, mostly involving faculty members and academic departments. Fralinger and Olson's definition (2007) of culture at the university level clusters administrators, faculty, students, board members and support staff as university stakeholders. It is their values and beliefs that are "thought to greatly influence decision-making processes at universities" (p. 86). Fralinger and Olson (2007) further describe the university

culture and assert differences between it and most business organizations. They argue, for starters, that university goals tend to be more difficult to assess or measure. Also, the diversity of stakeholders adds complexity to the study of culture and its strength (Bartell, 2003). For example, external stakeholders among the “surrounding community, the political jurisdiction, granting and accrediting agencies, unions and the press” (Fralinger & Olson, 2007, p. 86), often have different values and expectations than internal stakeholders. It is however, for the purpose of this study, the internal stakeholders that will guide the responses to my research questions. As Fralinger and Olson (2007) explain,

“The university culture is a great tapestry, where the beliefs and practices of trustees, senior administrators, faculty members, campus community members, competitors, and society combine to fundamentally shape the effectiveness of that university.” (p. 86)

A culture cannot exist if there is not a group unto its own (Schein, 1984). This initial statement will prepare this research to answer the subsequent research questions that will guide this study. I have attempted to narrow down the great amount of research in organizational culture, and created a specific path to assess the organizational culture in DES, focusing on its cultural strength. The methodology in the next chapter will look to answer the following:

RQ1: Do employees perceive DES as a strong culture during their probationary period (i.e., during their first 90 days)?

RQ2: Do employees perceive DES as a strong culture after their probationary period?

RQ3: Do employees feel a strong identification with DES during their probationary period?

RQ4: Do employees feel a strong identification with DES after their probationary period?

RQ5: Do the visible artifacts produced by DES indicate a strong culture?

## **Methodology**

Being part of SITS since 2006, and having covered different positions within its structure, I can provide information as a source. From being a student, and now full-time staff, I have worked within the DES organizational structure and have participated in its culture for 5 years. Being embedded in DES' culture led me to this present study. I began this research by engaging in informal conversations with the Director of Instructional Support (i.e., who is directly responsible for DES), as well as with my colleagues in the organization. I was very interested in understanding more about the underlying organizational assumptions, which Schein refers to, and building an initial assessment of how the organization's functions are impacted by its members' behaviors. The hope is to uncover those taken-for-granted attitudes and learn about the organizational cultural strength and understand the challenges and opportunities for DES's adaptability and endurance.

Assessing an organization's culture from the inside comes with its challenges as well as its advantages. Identities and identification within an organization's culture, and even within a subculture, provides social identity theorists plenty of research opportunities to gather data. Wright (2009) explores how middle managers in internal consulting positions cultivate different levels of identification depending on their status in and out of the organization. This insider's perspective presents a huge advantage to leverage organizational information, and produce highly accurate assessments of its identity and culture. Still, Wright (2009) also cautions that having such access represents a challenge in how these managers are perceived among the members of the organization, and can defy their loyalty to the group and their insider status. Understanding the challenge, my role as an insider is to provide accurate descriptions of the organization's behavior. I believe I am more than capable to provide in-depth interpretation of the visible artifacts, as well as the organizational discourse occurring within DES.

The flow of the literature review follows an outline that goes from a general perspective to a more specific one. One interesting perspective is to look into how organizational cultures can be derived

from a larger model such as a national culture. With this in the back of my mind, the next logical step was to define culture by itself and identify how organizational culture theorists use such definitions to expand their research. Once the relationship between these elements was established, there was a need to establish the definition of organizational culture this research will use to address its research questions. And finally, I needed to elaborate on a more specific concept to guide such questions. This concept is “strong culture,” and this research will use the concept to assess the organizational culture within DES. In addition, I am also interested in documenting individuals’ identification with the organization. Doing so can contribute to the assessment of cultural strength featured in this research.

Throughout the literature review, I established that culture includes several elements that, in conjunction, convey an idea of what the organization is like. Researchers like Denison and Mishra (1995) use these elements to assess effectiveness and strength, and emphasize their importance across the board. As discussed in the previous chapter, Deal and Kennedy (1982) focus on the environment, values, heroes, and rituals and ceremonies. Hackman and Johnson (2009) also look at values, and include symbols. Following these common trends, this research will look at these elements to address the five research questions using different methodologies.

First, I will attempt to reveal the sense of identification members in DES have toward the organization they are part of. Doing so will require a survey/questionnaire as measurement instrument to gather data based on the elements Deal, Kennedy, Hackman, and Johnson identified in their research. Secondly, the study will focus on analyzing a variety of artifacts related to DES’ functions. The questionnaire was prepared in SurveyMonkey®, and was given a simple structure. Only two questions were created, one multiple choice to answer the status as current or former member of the organization, and one using a 7-point rating scale based on Hackman & Johnson’s (2009) organizational self-identification questionnaire.

I will perform a rhetorical analysis of visible artifacts such as policies, the mission statement, available organizational documentation, and technology. What I hope to achieve with this data is to identify those underlying assumptions, hidden feelings, and perceptions that can help expand my knowledge of the organizational culture. Overall, the goal of the study is to develop a body of information that can contribute to the quality of the organizational culture at DES. To achieve this goal, there must be an initial assessment and map of what this culture looks like. Since this was never attempted at this organization's level, this study hopes to establish that initial assessment.

Research questions 1 to 4 will utilize a questionnaire Hackman & Johnson (2009) adapted from Cheney's study of organizational identification (1983). This is a 16-question survey designed to gather data on the level of identification by members in DES. This 7-point survey will ask individuals about their perception of DES's cultural strength. A distinction will be made between members who have been working there for 90 days or less, and those who have been with the organization beyond this period. Ninety days is considered (i.e., by internal policy) to be a confirmation period for a newly hired employee. During this period, the organization can decide whether the individual is meeting the expectations for the position s/he was hired for. The 90-day confirmation period can be a distinctive point of comparison to assess how culture is perceived in DES at an early stage of employment and at a more mature one. A subsequent comparison between statements will also look to provide information about the responses and lead the researcher to discover underlying assumptions about the organization's members. Statement comparisons inferring a common meaning will be clustered to identify key terms that can produce specific categories or groupings. It is intended that these categories offer a more specific focus on statement responses. An example can be to find words or phrases that elicit a sense of loyalty. Phrases such as "I identify with" or "I share with" can be considered to communicate a sense of belonging. Question 5 will involve a rhetorical analysis of the visible artifacts available at DES. These artifacts consist of available information on the internal structure of the organization, as well as policies

that guide its behavior. Furthermore, I will look into available work processes that may provide insight into uncovering those underlying assumptions, to better assess the organization's cultural strength. Between electronic mail, project management software, content management systems, and other sources of this type (i.e., blogs and wikis), I will break down information into "digestible chunks" and identify prevalent themes (or issues) that can provide a sense of what meanings are being construed by the organization's members.

## **Results: Visible Artifacts**

Results are presented by starting with the visible artifact analysis. Doing so will complement the analysis from the self-identification questionnaire, which provided interesting comparisons from individual responses under determined categories developed for this study. The description of these artifacts can help conceptualize questionnaire responses. Schein describes the visible artifacts as the

“... constructed environment of the organization, its architecture, technology, office layout, manner of dress, visible or audible behavior patterns, and public documents such as charters, employee orientation materials, stories.” (Schein, 1984, p.3)

The challenge, as Schein describes, is not the accessibility of these artifacts, but producing accurate interpretations of what they mean in terms of the organization’s culture. These interpretations, he argues, can be done through the review of documents and charters as well as interviewing key members.

### **Constructed environment and architecture**

The constructed environment and architecture are influenced by the academic settings of a university and its campus. DES is located on the top floor of one of the university’s largest classroom and auditorium buildings. The suite of offices where DES resides is also the headquarters for its parent organizations: SITS and VP-C. DES uses most of the office space in this area. Its members occupy five out of the six large available spaces, providing sufficient space to accommodate its 30 staff and student employees. Each member currently has his or her own workspace assigned in each of four rooms. Furniture varies from complete desk sets for staff, to student working stations consisting of one large 50-inch table to accommodate the hardware. The DES area provides students with individual drawers for storing personal items. These drawers are located in a larger shelving unit in one of the larger rooms. Each of the rooms utilized by the organization is equipped with medium and large whiteboards. In some rooms, one of these is allocated to one staff member’s desk area. These white boards are usually used for visualizing project or concept designs, but there are a couple that are utilized to list tasks and responsibilities for all members. This list includes stakeholders’ roles, such as collaborating faculty

members working on their online courses. Each time they visit the DES area, they can observe the status of their course and identify the progress made. Some faculty members describe the whiteboards to be a little intimidating because they portray a busy environment. It communicates DES is very dynamic.

The office layouts vary within the different areas in the organizations. The Media Production and Graphic Design group (MP&GD) uses one of the smaller spaces, and hosts seven members (six of them are student workers). The rooms occupied by the Software Production Area (SPA) and Online Learning (OL) group are larger and distribute their space differently depending on the type of furniture they have. SPA has an island set up in the middle of each room to accommodate eight student workstations in total, plus staff and more workstations surrounding them to sit the rest of the group. In total, there are ten member spaces in one room, and seven in the other. The latter one includes a section to shelve the organization's library, which includes a wide range of software tutorial books, as well as instructional design and web content development resources. The OL group also uses two larger rooms. One to house six staff members with full desk sets, and one to sit ten individuals, of which eight are students and their workstations.

The interpretation can be made that the area where the organization is housed enjoys the commodity of having very good office space and privacy. The large rooms should offer sufficient space for members to feel comfortable at all times as they perform their responsibilities. The way the three production areas in DES are allocated within the office spaces communicates a territorial distribution. This situation does not necessarily have to be interpreted in a negative manner, but it does show that there is a degree of distinction between these internal entities derived from the different type of work they do. Even the lighting makes a difference. For example, the media production area almost never turns on the incandescent ceiling lights that are part of the building. The group works in a low lighting environment throughout the day and they seem to not have a problem with it. New members joining the media production area seem to not have any problem adapting to this environment, or at least none of

them has said anything about it. This can be an example of the underlying assumptions taken for granted in the organization. This is not necessarily something that can present the organization in a negative light, but this example does provide a good reference point for analyzing the organization's visible artifacts.

Another reference point for analyzing the office layout is the furniture used by staff in the different areas. Staff at the Online Learning development group, have full desk sets that none of the rest of the staff in other areas have. These desks were a relatively recent acquisition by the organization in order to provide a more productive workspace for the individuals using them. These desks were intentionally chosen to provide a meeting spot between staff and faculty with whom they collaborate. There seems not to be any issue among the rest of the staff with these desks being assigned to this group of individuals. More accurately, a feeling of indifference seemed to communicate the desks are not a source of any type of conflict amongst members. In recent months, the carpet had been renewed and that the furniture had to be either moved or disassembled, so the director took the opportunity to propose an activity and have the staff group present a furniture arrangement that was different from the way it was prior the new carpet being installed. A second piece to this activity was that each staff member had to relocate to a different desk. Staff, aside from the work it entailed to move their belongings to the new space, seemed to have understood the message from the director that the central component to the workspace is the individual and not a desk.

#### Technology available

Technology access is an important component for the organization's work. Each year, based on current and future project needs, the organization invests in technology resources to address the challenges in each of the organization's work areas. For each staff member and student employee at DES there is one personal computer workstation assigned with two monitors. The extra screen is to assist with the use of different tools at one time, and contribute to a faster production pace. In addition,

the organization's members have access to very recent (if not the most recent) versions of software to work on their projects: web content design, animated interactions, graphic design, audio and video production/edition, and other applications.

Overall, technology access is not an issue within the organization. Member complaints on the technology they use might surface in specific situations, either when these basic settings are compromised, or specific related issues with a particular piece of equipment or software exist. Still, there is no indication that the organization and its members are negatively impacted by the technology they use or lack thereof.

#### SITS Website

I was unable to find a specific virtual address for DES. There is no such thing as a direct website link to the organization known as DES. There is, however, information about the organization under its parent organization's (i.e., SITS) official website. The site provides information about what DES does within the SITS umbrella, this includes aligning to its mission and vision, which is also displayed in one of the site's pages. The initial assumption, based on the information accessible via the website, is that DES as such is not an organization that stands alone. If someone wants to find out more about what the organization does, he or she will need to understand what SITS does first. To what extent does DES exist as an organization name (or acronym)? Who, besides its members, refers to DES as such? These are questions that surface from the earlier assumption that information about the organization is practically non-existent to external entities within the university setting, much less outside campus. To reinforce the assumption, DES members are listed as part of the SITS website, under the "SITS Staff" tab. The list includes, of course, staff members not directly involved with the organization processes in DES. The questions presented in this section will be revisited further along in this section, within the results of the self-identification questionnaire applied to DES's members at the time. The questionnaire responses suggest that DES is something used intermittently even within its membership, let alone by

external entities (i.e., even immediate ones from the SITS umbrella structure). One thing the analysis brought to my attention is that Online Learning, one of DES's areas or subdivisions has its own section within the site.

#### Mission and vision: strategic plan

Following the analysis of the SITS website, DES shares its mission and vision with its parent organization. There is no specific mention of a mission and vision for the child organization to entities outside its membership, and the information referenced describes the "Vision, Mission and Goals" for SITS as a whole. From the way information is presented, one can perceive that DES does not have a mission, vision, or goals as an entity of its own. Or if existent, they strictly align to SITS mission, vision, and goals. The fact is that a vision for DES as a defined organization does exist, and it is defined within its strategic plan: "Distance Learning Strategic Plan 2007-2012." This document only makes reference to the vision of the organization, and provides a background as to how DES resulted from the evolution of previous entities. The strategic plan offers very clear metrics of how the organization responsibility and vision aligns to the university's larger strategic plan. In essence then, DES's vision is the result of producing a strategic plan aligned to the university one. There is still no mission to be found through the available artifacts, bolstering the assumption that there is none if the search is this difficult.

#### SITS organizational chart

Official organizational charts, such as the ones presented in this research's literature, are non-existent at a more specific level for SITS or DES. The intention of the study was to find a defined structure of how DES fits within the SITS umbrella to develop a clearer notion of how members differentiate their perception of both, and know when to refer to one or the other. The fact that there is no clear structure or chart available, in any document or the website itself, indicates members might get confused. There is no director or managerial leader title for DES specifically. The person responsible for guiding the organization has the title of Director for Instructional Support, which relates more to SITS

than DES directly. There are managers in the different areas of DES, and they have an adopted responsibility to ensure their respective areas' work is completed. Still, they seem to be only responsible for the work the area produces and do not have any decision making power over the organization's structure, strategy, and budget. This conclusion is taken from the next artifact, the DES Developer's Handbook.

#### Developer's Handbook (DH)

The DH is a document drafted for student workers at DES, to help them understand the organization's procedures and expectations. There is no revision date in the document draft obtained for this study, so it was initially not clear if the information in the document was in fact the version with the most current information about the organization. This document provides the most specific information I could find about how DES functions amongst all artifacts analyzed. The complete title of the document is "This is the DES Developer's Handbook: How to maximize your experience at SITS", which reinforces the parent organization's presence amongst its members. The 22-page document is the only artifact found to provide a clear sentence defining DES as a division comprised of students and staff working within the office of SITS. It then shares the exact mission SITS provides in its website. The document continues to describe the three subdivisions at DES this study refers to as areas within the organization. These areas, as previously stated, are given formal titles and descriptions in the DH: Software Production Area (SPA), Online Learning (OL), and Media Production and Graphic Design (MP&GD). Together, these subdivisions integrate the scope of work for DES and are "clearly defined" areas that have specific foci and require specific skills. The document, however, does communicate a high sense of collaboration between areas and even encourages students to collaborate (e.g., through project development) and learn some of the other areas' skill set.

The DH review concluded that this is a rather complete document that provides students a good reference as to the internal policies of DES, such as dress code, working schedule policies, punctuality,

academic standing requirements, staff contact information, computer usage policies, and other important information for student workers to understand during their “adaptation period” in the organization. This document, different from the other artifacts, was the most complete piece of information this researcher used to have a better understanding of the organizational culture at DES. What makes this analysis interesting is that the DH is a document for internal use only, and that it is not available through any official source of information for SITS, much less for DES. Furthermore, the provision of the DH only to DES student workers admits that this is a very specific document aimed at a select group of individuals, and that it is not intended to communicate externally the processes and structure of the organization. By the same token, this document also admits that there is a sustained effort to maintain cultural cohesion amongst DES members.

#### Other visible artifacts

Something can be construed the type of branded artifacts that members from DES wear, use, or give away as part of any identity positioning with other university entities and the community. DES identity in shirts, sweaters, lanyards, and other apparel is non-existent. Furthermore, any provided accessories are branded instead with the SITS identity. The closest to DES identification came in a shirt that had the words “Online Learning” embroidered on it, along with the logo of the university, focusing only on one of DES subdivisions. This example may offer some insight into a possible hierarchy amongst the subdivisions themselves. This example, along the SITS website information, has the Online Learning component at DES standing out more than to the other two areas or subdivisions. Samples of artifacts reviewed list three polo shirt designs, two sweater designs and 1 lanyard design. Included in the branded artifacts reviewed were pens, mugs, USB keys, hand sanitizing sprays, and bags. All were SITS branded. Stationary objects and member professional cards for DES are non-existent as well. All of these utilize SITS branded material only for identification within the organization as well as with external entities.

A concluding statement on this visible artifact analysis can address the question about how many of the members surveyed have used, are aware, or have accessed any or all of these artifacts. Are all student workers aware of the strategic plan? Or is this document provided only to staff members? Does the SITS site also list the student workers? Have all staff members read the Developer's Handbook? These are only a few questions that came up during the analysis of the artifacts that may provide more data to help discover the underlying assumptions within the organization.

#### Results: Organizational Self-Identification Questionnaire

Over a period of three weeks, individuals were contacted and provided with the information and link to the self-identification questionnaire. The self-identification questionnaire was sent to 32 individuals who are currently working at DES, or have been part of DES within the last year. Knowing that the population surveyed was a small one, it was important to achieve as close to a 100% completion rate as possible. After the first communication was sent, there was a very good response from individuals currently active in the organization. Almost half of the contacts had already completed the survey. Those who were not in the organization anymore took a bit longer to respond, so a follow-up email was sent after two weeks of the first email contact. Turnaround increased and the final count showed that from the 32 individuals contacted, 28 responded (i.e., a response rate of nearly 88%).

Analysis of responses to the self-identification questionnaire was done by reviewing each question after responses were collected, and by developing categorizations for more specific cross-comparison. This analysis was done in different layers to allow the possibility of finding common trends or issues that could guide the research to discern underlying assumptions that offer a perspective of the current organizational cultural strength at DES. A preliminary semantic analysis allowed the study to identify key words or phrases in each statement that lead to a deeper understanding of the responses each of them was attempting to elicit. These key words or phrases identified trends and themes that were turned into categories or clusters for presenting a more clear visualization of the questionnaire's

results. It's important to mention that analysis of each individual's responses was needed to clarify questions that came up that would help the comparison analysis.

The process for finding themes began by identifying the key term(s) or phrase(s) in each statement. Each short statement was read carefully to find specific words (verbs or adjectives) that could demarcate and/or could distinguish it from the rest.

	Answer Options / Statements	Breakdown	Key words/phrase
1	I am very proud to be an employee of DES	I am, very proud	proud
2	DES's image in the community represents me as well	Image, represents me	Represents
3	I often describe myself to others by saying, "I work for DES" or "I am from DES"	Myself to others, I work for, I am	I work for, I am from
4	I try to make on-the-job decisions by considering the consequences of my actions for DES	I try, on-the-job decisions, consequences, my actions	Consequences of my actions
5	I am glad I chose to work for DES rather than another company	I am glad, chose to work, rather than	Chose
6	In general, I view DES's problems as my own	I view, problems as my own	problems as my own
7	I'm willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help DES become successful.	I am willing, great deal, effort beyond, normally expected	Willing, great, effort
8	I have a lot in common with others employed by DES.	I have, a lot, common with others	Common, others
9	I find it difficult to agree with DES's policies on important matters relating to me	Difficult to agree, policies, important matters related to me	Difficult to agree, important matters to me
10	My association with DES is only a small part of who I am	My association, only a small part of who I am	Association, part of, who I am
11	I find that my values and the values of DES are very similar	My values, values of DES, similar	Values, similar
12	I feel very little loyalty to DES	I feel, very, little, loyalty	Loyalty
13	I would describe DES as a large "family" in which most members feel a sense of belonging	Describe as, large family, most members, feel, sense of belonging	Sense of belonging
14	I find it easy to identify with DES	I find, easy, identify with	Identify with
15	I really care about the fate of DES	I, care, fate	Care

Table 1. Semantic analysis of DES's self-identification questionnaire

Once each statement was deconstructed, the key words could provide a better opportunity to derive theme from them. The ultimate goal for identifying these themes was to find immediate comparison possibilities once I looked at the response data. The following results show a content analysis of both questions, and each of the 15 statements in the rating scale section of the questionnaire. The goal, as earlier stated was to identify possible trends or themes that can provide an initial assessment of the organizational culture strength perception at DES through the analysis of members' sense of identification with the organization. Perhaps this information could illustrate and guide ideas for solutions to potential organizational culture issues found, and/or help to enhance activities currently implemented within the organization.

The analysis focused on each participant's statement responses as an attempt to determine trends in individual and group responses that could allow deeper analysis looking for underlying assumptions. Clusters, or categories, were created based on the statements deemed to have similar meaning derived from them, whether positively or not. This clustering or categorization of responses, based on the 15 statements, was helpful in deriving common trends or themes that could help answer more questions than what arose during the analysis. By looking at the responses from similar statements, the study seeks to find commonalities and /or discrepancies that could explain better the underlying assumptions this study attempts to clarify, or expand on further research ideas to improve the organizational culture strength. Most themes were immediately identifiable from key words in the statements, and there were few defined from semantic analysis. These feelings were then grouped based on the commonality of the triggered responses under one key theme: pride/satisfaction, loyalty/responsibility, and sense of belonging/extension of self. The following diagram provides a preliminary visualization of where each statement was found to fit in based on their analysis.

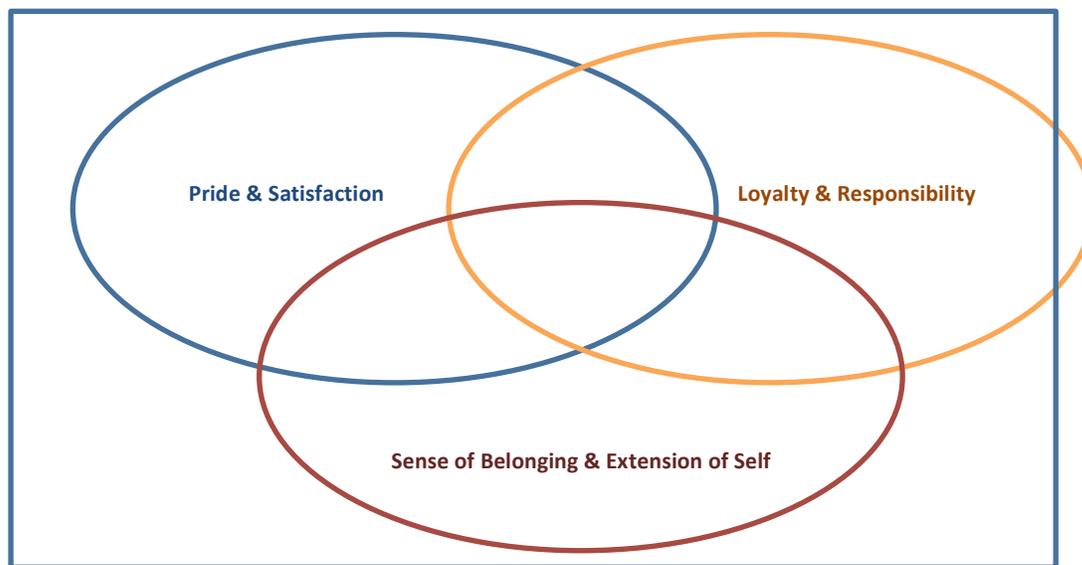


Figure 3. Semantic analysis clusters

## Question 1: Length

As initially intended, the first question helped categorize the responses to determine those who have been working in the organization three months or less, three months or more, and also those who were not part of the organization for the last year or so. Schein (1984) states that the strength of the culture can be defined by the group's stability and homogeneity, as well as by the length and intensity of the experiences shared throughout the members' tenure. Responses to question 1 of the questionnaire were able to provide more insight into how the organization's membership has had time to endure shared experiences. Almost 70 percent of the respondents are active in the organization and have been working for three months or more, which suggests that responses in the questionnaire reflect current perceptions to further assess culture strength.

Being in an academic setting, the dynamic environment of the organization shows that there were a few respondents who had started to work at DES for fewer than three months. These respondents represented roughly 12 percent of the population surveyed. On the other hand, almost 20 percent of the respondents were no longer working within the organization. This last category was added later in the study to identify the distribution of respondents.

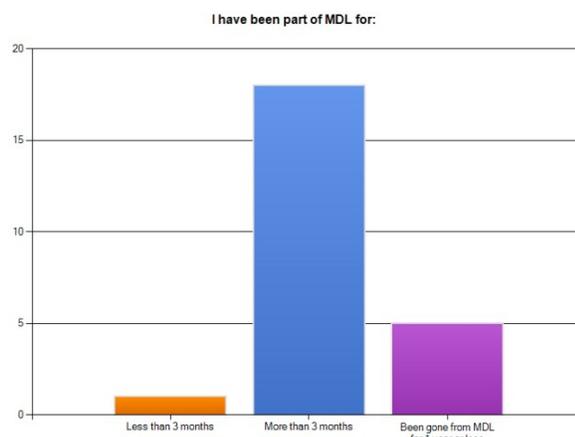


Figure 4. Responses of how long respondents have worked at DES

## Question 2: Organizational attitude

The second set of responses deals with the members' attitude representation using a 7-point rating scale. Participants were asked about their level of agreement or disagreement with 15 statements describing positive or negative feelings toward the organization.

Statement 1: "I am very proud to be an employee of DES"

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
I am very proud to be an employee of DES	0	0	0	2	8	6	12	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

The analysis of this statement focused on the phrase "I am very proud." This phrase was divided in three parts: I am/very/proud. Immediate attention is given to the sense of pride being directly requested with the key word "proud." Still, the first part of the phrase, like in most the statements in this questionnaire, looks at the individual relationship between the member and the organization. This is significant because the respondent is asked to do a reflection of him or herself as one part of a collective unit. The focus on individual perceptions highlights the questionnaire's intent to value each response, invoking a feeling of importance in each member. The first distinction the respondent has to make is to address the statement as an independent thinker or as contributor to a collective consciousness. The second part of the phrase deals with an adverbial function that heightens the sense of pride that the last part invokes. Having to think to what extent the respondent is proud of being part of the organization can influence the rating scale selection. If the respondent feels a high sense of pride, s/he will be inclined to opt for the "Very Strongly Agree" option to demonstrate such level of pride. However, there may be respondents who considered they had enough pride to agree but not to a point where they feel they need to emphasize it. To be proud of being part of the organization refers to a feeling of pleasure from having made a decision, or having achieved something. It can also evoke satisfaction from participating or associating with a person, persons, or events. In this case, the demonstration of pride through the statement's response can explain how each individual feels about belonging to the organization. This

satisfaction from belonging to DES situated the statement as part of two of the categories identified earlier in the research.

The overall results for this statement showed no negative inclination toward being proud to work at DES. Most participants (43%) who positively responded, very strongly agreed in having a sense of pride in belonging to the organization in its different areas. The interesting piece of this question relates to the distribution of this perceived positive attitude between those who are indifferent and those who agree at different levels. There is a difference of more than 20 points between those showing strong pride toward DES. The perception of what constitutes strong agreement and very strong agreement seems to create a considerable difference for at least six individuals. More so, having the option of strongly agree and very strongly agree, almost a 30% chose simply to agree. Eight participants decided that agreeing was enough to convey their sentiment of pride toward the organization. Two respondents remained neutral in their responses, and reflect a low level of apathy for the organization’s membership. What is interesting to point out, though, is that the two respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement have been in the organization for more than the three-month period. Overall, responses to this statement show a strong positive sentiment about membership at DES.

Statement 2: “DES’s image in the community represents me as well”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
DES image in the community represents me as well	0	0	1	6	4	6	11	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

The relationship between the individual and DES is addressed in this statement by involving external elements in the environment in which the members function on a frequent basis. The visible artifacts pointed to the layers of organizational entities that relate to DES everyday functions, and with this in mind, asking respondents about the organization’s image in the community might trigger different responses depending on what each member defined as community. What are the possibilities that some considered the university, or SITS as the limit of for DES extent outside its membership?

Some may have even considered the local community outside the university's wall before responding to this statement. In what ways, then, could the interpretation of community have influenced the respondents' decision on a specific rating scale selection? The result and numbers do not show any potential distinctions to answer these questions. It is not certain that defining what community meant would have change the outcome of these results.

Throughout the study, the context describes the organization as the larger entity by referring to its members as a part of it. The statement intends for respondents to think about the organization as an extension of their personality and the sentence structure denotes the organization as a component of the individual's culture and not the other way around. Responses then are influenced by the individual's perception of ownership in this relationship. Having someone representing one's self indicates there is an agreement, verbal or written, and that the perception of such representation means actions taken by one party are accepted by the other. The statement could have had respondents think about each of the organization's individuals representing them externally. It could also have influenced respondents' thinking about how the collective consciousness reflects on their individual images before responding. The way the organization projects itself to the community revealed some indifference, and even disagreement amongst the participants' responses. Although the majority still viewed the organization's image in the community as an extension of themselves (75%), six respondents (21%) communicated they neither agree nor disagree with the statement. This number is one of the largest amongst the neutral responses for each statement. One respondent disagreed with the notion that the organization represents his or her views in the community. Interestingly, the respondent is an active member of the organization. Although the response may not have a major impact on the culture strength assessment, it does show there is one member who feels either indifferent to the organization's image with regards to his or her own; or is willing to endure the image differences for other reasons. An important result to note is that

approximately 25% of the organization doesn't agree with it being an extension of themselves in the community.

Statement 3: "I often describe myself to others by saying, "I work for DES." Or "I am from DES."

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
I often describe myself to others by saying, "I work for DES" or "I am from DES"	1	2	3	2	4	7	9	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

The word "often" denotes frequency, and in this case, the frequency of "I work for DES" or "I am from DES" had responses all across the spectrum. All seven points were represented with at least one respondent. Still, the slight majority (32%) showed a very strong sense of belonging to the organization. 25% strongly agreed, and 14% just agreed. six out of the 28 respondents (22%) were on the disagreeing side of the scale, showing a weak sense of identification with DES. Now, the interesting aspect of this statement lies with a further analysis to find out if there is really a lack of identification, or was there another reason to disagree. Of all the disagreeing participants, five of them have been working in the organization more than three months. These examples were used to crosstab with other similar questions to dig deeper and find a possible issue that one or more individuals may have with the organization. Based on the categories with similar questions, statement 3 identifies with pride and satisfaction, as well as a sense of belonging. Similar statements such as 1 and 8 present some discrepancies about respondents' attitudes toward the organization. Differences with statement 1, for example, showed there is not a correlation between the sense of pride and uttering the words "I am from" or "I work for." The interpretation of these words may not be important for the six individuals who disagreed at some level with this statement 3. One important detail is that the neutral responses were much fewer than those for statement 1. There were very few respondents who may have found the statement unclear or confusing; showing the sense of belonging is something they consider important. In addition, there seems to be an important theme showing from the comparison between this statement analysis, and the visible artifacts statement. Respondents might be more in tune to present themselves as

part of SITS or the Online Learning group specifically, than they would do with DES. The artifacts consistently show there is more emphasis on the use of the former titles.

Statement 4: “I try to make on-the-job decisions by considering the consequences of my actions for DES”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
I try to make on-the-job decisions by considering the consequences of my actions for DES	0	0	0	2	8	5	13	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

Addressing the consequences of their actions invokes a sense of responsibility amongst members with regards to the performance of their duties in the organization. Thinking about the consequences of their actions, members seem to adopt a preventive or cautionary position when making decisions they know impact the organization’s behavior and function. This cautionary attitude may or may not represent if they care about the organization itself, rather than their own situation. Caring for one’s self and the organization should overlap at some point, especially since there seems to be a high sense of pride and satisfaction derived from the previous statements, as well as clarity in the responses for this particular one. Most respondents agreed at different levels that they consider the consequences of their on-the-job decisions. 64% of participants strongly and very strongly agreed on such impact, while eight participants (28%) just agreed. Although there can be some difference in the way participants perceived the sense of responsibility when reading this statement, the lack of responses on the disagreeing scale allows the assumption respondents do care about the organization, and consider the consequences their decisions and actions may produce in the work environment. Furthermore, the level of care also extends to a sense of loyalty or strong sense of support toward the organization. There were two participants who responded neutrally to the impact their decisions can make to the organization. The number might be low enough to discard it as having a high impact on the overall perception of the organization’s culture. Still, in an organization with approximately 30 individuals, this sentiment of indifference from two members who have been working in the organization for more than three months is something worth

looking into, and cannot be taken for granted when looking for organizational strategies to enhance group cohesion and cultural strength.

Statement 5: “I am glad I chose to work for DES rather than another company”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
I am glad I chose to work for DES rather than another company	0	0	0	2	6	10	10	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

This statement relates to statements 1, 3, and 8, and appeals to the level of satisfaction members derive from being part of the organization. Feeling “glad” shows the decision has proved to be a positive one amongst members. The statement is structured to have respondents think about their decision to select DES as their place of work and develop comparisons to other companies in order to provide a scale selection. The statement assumes the existence of other company possibilities, whether as concrete options at the time of the decision, or potential options taken from own experiences and the experiences of others. Either way, the intention was to stimulate their sense of satisfaction based on the comparison(s) made. 20 respondents (72%) felt strongly and very strongly of having chosen to apply and work in DES, which confirms the high level of satisfaction amongst members of having chosen to work for the organization. This analysis might be further understood by looking at respondents showing the different lengths of time they have been part of the organization. What type of interpretation can be inferred from those individuals who are active in the organization, and have been working for more than three months? The positive responses could be considered as a reaffirmation of their satisfaction. On the other hand, those with less than three months can be answering based on a comparison to their most recent job, allowing a possible interpretation of how DES is perceived when compared to other organizations. All but two responses express satisfaction of having chosen DES over another company, which shows there is no substantial difference in perception between those with had just joined the organization and those who have been working for more than three months.

Same as the previous statement analysis, two participants communicated indifference with their selection to neither agree nor disagree. The difference with regards to the previous point is that one participant is currently working in the organization, whereas the other one no longer works there. The numbers still show a high level of satisfaction from respondents, which would be enough to consider the organization’s positive impact on those recent members, those who remain working, and those who are no longer active.

Statement 6: “In general, I view DES’ problems as my own”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
In general, I view DES’ problems as my own	1	2	3	3	8	5	6	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

This statement analysis, similar to statement 3, rated throughout the scale. Both of these ratings were clustered further along the positive end of the spectrum, confirming the sentiment of belonging in the organization. Six participants disagreed at different levels that they shared the same issues with their current or former organization (three of them strongly and very strongly disagreed). All of them, except one, are active members of the organization; and have been working in DES beyond the three-month period. Adding to this, three more respondents (11%) couldn’t say if they’d adopt the organization’s problems as their own. The sum of participants not willing to agree on this statement appears to be quite high, and more interestingly, they are active in the organization. These numbers, added to statement 3 responses show -at the very least in a superficial manner- that there are an important number of individuals having difficulty relating to the organization’s culture. The subsequent cluster analysis may provide more information about this situation.

It is not surprising that the responses to this statement showed more polarizing results. Owning the organization’s problems shows a high level of responsibility and loyalty. This means those who agreed at some level are adopting responsibility for the rest of the members actions within the organization, more specifically the problems they may have caused individually, as a group within the

organization, or as a complete collective unit. A positive trend can be seen from analyzing this statement alongside statement 4, which shows that members think about the consequences of their actions before making decisions on the job. Still, although this trend indicates that respondents are aware that their decisions impact others and vice versa, there are a few who are not willing to take ownership of the organization’s problems. This may have to do with the differentiation between other members’ actions and other problems inherent to the organization that can be traced to other sources, such as external political decisions from the parent organizations (SITS and the university). The interpretation of this statement, overall, does show that members are willing to go as far as to agree to take ownership of the organization’s problems, showing a strong level of loyalty and responsibility to DES.

Statement 7: “I’m willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help DES become successful”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
I'm willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help DES become successful	0	0	0	3	6	7	12	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

The range for the responses to this statement suggests that participants agree at differing levels about going the extra mile to help the organization become successful. 43% of respondents very strongly agree, while 25% and 21% strongly agree and just agree respectively. Three participants, or 11% of the total count, cannot seem to make up their minds about their effort beyond what is asked from them on a regular basis.

This is one of the longest statements in the questionnaire and, similar to the previous statement, adheres to the category of loyalty and responsibility. There are a few important terms in this statement that are worth analyzing, and that could have created different perceptions amongst respondents. Willingness refers to the disposition members in the organization show to achieve a specific goal or result. In this example, they are asked if they would have the disposition of go beyond what’s expected to achieve those results. Pride also plays an important role in defining the amount of effort a member is

willing to put forth for the organization's success. Willingness can be perceived at distinct levels, and a comparison to a sense of pride may be required to reach a more specific understanding. The most pride-specific statement, 1, does build on the responses of statement 7 and can confirm there is willingness from members to go beyond what is expected from them to achieve the organization's goals. Going beyond what is expected is another key phrase that needs to be analyzed. What does it mean to go beyond what's normally expected? More so when the statement goes further to ask if such willingness is sustained when there is a "great deal of effort" involved. The assumption can be made that "beyond what is normally expected" is an expression that touches on the sense of pride for members in the organization. Some pressure might exist for members to respond to this statement in a positive way so they are not perceived as someone with little loyalty to the organization. The numbers show there is no disagreeing responses, and when compared to statement 13, there seems to be some sense of those underlying assumptions Schein talks about. Still, statement 10 does provide some support to the notion that members are willing to go the extra mile to make the organization successful. Responses to statements 1, 2, 4, 6, and 11 make a strong case that individuals are highly invested in the organization, and its success extends to their success as well as failure does.

Negative responses do not necessarily mean the individuals are not committed to performing their everyday tasks to the best of their abilities, or that they are not considered team players in the organization. These responses can be easily misconstrued and can have different explanations. For example, maybe the respondent feels the extra effort is not necessary if the work is done properly in the first place, which may bring up issues of productivity. Maybe family or other projects already take their extra time and attention, which ties to statement 10 and the perception that the organization is only a small part of who they are. It is important, however, to denote that there are a few individuals who might feel differently about spending their extra time and energy at the organization.

Statement 8: “I have a lot in common with others employed by DES”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
I have a lot in common with others employed by DES	0	0	4	3	6	7	8	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

When asked if they have a lot in common with others employed in DES, responses were mainly positive. The level of agreement, added up, comprises the majority of responses, or 21 (75%). Eight respondents felt very strong about sharing a lot in common with others (29%). Those strongly agreeing totaled seven (25%), and six just chose to simply agree (21%). This majority allows the assumption that DES as an organization has an acceptable level of homogeneity amongst its membership, which by definition (Schein, 1984) supposes an inclination to a strong culture. The responses to this statement do throw some disagreeing numbers to consider. Four members (14%) disagree with having a lot in common with their fellow co-workers. At the same time, three other members (11%) neither agree nor disagree with the statement altogether. This side of the scale might invite the assumption that there are members who have a degree of heterogeneity with regards to the rest of the group. Carefully looking at the statement though, we can also invite the assumption that these heterogeneous members read the text carefully and decided that “a lot” might not have been the best choice of word to define their commonality to other members of the organization. This commonality level may have to be addressed further with additional data collection instruments to obtain a more clear interpretation of this statement by the respondents. I think similarly of those who decided to stay neutral in their responses, to remain in the air of caution. From those who disagree at a different level, two are not active and two are. One of the latter has been working for more than three months, and one less than that. Although the range in these responses varies, there is no specific trend identifiable in this analysis.

Statement 9: “I find it difficult to agree with DES policies on important matters relating to me”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
I find it difficult to agree with DES policies on important matters relating to me	3	6	8	7	3	0	1	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

The majority of respondents confirmed disagreeing at different levels with having difficulties to harmonize with the organization’s policies with regards to matters relating to them. This is a statement in the rating scale that was presented with a negative syntax, and the results show 17 out of the 28 respondents (61%) are able to match the organization’s policies with their own. On the other hand, four individuals did agree to the difficulty (14%) of sharing the organization’s policies when it comes to perceived matters of importance to them. These policies can be defined by the visible artifacts analyzed in the early part of this study, including the ones from parent organizations such as SITS and The University that fundamentally influence DES’s core policies. It is also important to mention that there are policies that affect certain groups with regards to others. For example, the Developers Handbook pertains to the student worker group which can influence the percentages for the responses if those show some disagreement.

What was interesting was the number of those who remained neutral to the statement. Seven respondents (25%) did not think that agreeing or disagreeing was the correct sentiment describing their perceptions. Out of these seven, five are currently active within the organization. Some of the inferences regarding this statement’s responses can range from mere indifference to the perception that there really were no important issues they consider being affected from the organization’s policies. The reference to “important” matters may have specified enough for respondents to create a distinction between what they consider is really important and what falls outside their tolerance threshold. An example can be the implementation of a dress code that they may consider strict compared to their standards. However, this is something that they would not have a problem accepting because they have deemed it tolerable. There is also the need to consider the syntax of the statement may have created a “false negative” in which the

participant may have assumed s/he was answering positively. This may have skewed the analysis by having a respondent meaning the opposite to what they answered.

Statement 10: “My association with DES is only a small part of who I am”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
My association with DES is only a small part of who I am	0	3	8	7	4	4	2	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

When asked if their participation in the organization was only a small part of who they were, respondents disagreed for the most part this was true (8/29%). To this number we can add the three participants who strongly disagree with this statement totaling almost 40% of the respondents. Almost the same can be said for the opposite side of the spectrum, with 10 participants agreeing this statement conveyed their perceptions. Four agreed, four strongly agreed, and two very strongly agreed. In the neutral range, having neither agreed nor disagreed, seven individuals (25%) did not define their posture.

The perception of those agreeing with the statement can have different reasons as to why they responded this way. An organization does not necessarily have to affect every aspect of the individual’s life, and it is possible in this case that the respondents perceived their life to be more multidimensional. Furthermore, the phrase “only a small part” can elicit different perceptions, thus having different responses. What does a “small part” mean when responding to the statement? Agreeing sentiments toward can be misinterpreted so the sense of loyalty to the organization seems lower than expected. The case can be made that many respondents are/were student workers whose reason for being in a university setting is precisely to complete their degree, acquire some experience if possible, and develop their skill set in order to graduate and find a higher paying job or start their businesses. The underlying assumption then, is that DES is a stepping stone to develop their professional career, but that there is still a high sense of loyalty that can be related to this assumption. Assumptions for staff members are less easy to construe because their work cycle is longer (even much longer) than those of student workers.

DES might not be considered a stepping stone for other projects and levels of satisfaction, so a sense of loyalty can be perceived differently.

One-fourth of respondents to this statement responded neutrally. They may perceive the phrase “only a small part” was not clear enough to incline their responses to agree or disagree. An interesting observation is that almost all respondents who are no longer active in the organization disagreed with the feeling that their association with DES is only a small part of who they are.

Statement 11: “I find that my values and the values of DES are very similar”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
I find that my values and the values of DES are very similar	0	0	2	6	14	5	1	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

In Schein’s definition of cultural organization (1984), a group is not able to survive if it cannot manage itself as precisely that, a group. Identifying values within an organization invites a degree of complexity, and this statement might reflect only a small part of what Schein describes as the powerful underlying assumptions that can make individuals adapt or adopt the organization’s value system. At the same time, in order to determine a group’s values, he continues that it is imperative to delve into the underlying assumptions provided by what members perceive, think, and feel. The key for this statement relates to the shared values between the respondents and the organization. The majority of respondents agreed at different levels that the organizational values align to their own. 50% of responses simply agreed this was true. Five respondents (18%) strongly agreed, and only one very strongly agreed. Six participants (21%) did not agree or disagree with this statement, and only two simply disagreed. Still, this statement continues the trend showing a high sense of pride as well as loyalty to the organization. It also strengthens the notion that there is a high sense of belonging and that the organization can be construed as an extension of its employees.

The six participants that neither agreed nor disagreed, plus the two that disagreed, may provide more insight into underlying assumptions. In fact, all of the participants disagreeing are active members

of the organization, which reinforces this notion. A good starting point is that almost a third of the respondents were open to express their disagreement, which can be construed as something positive toward understanding a possible trend regarding the adoption of taken-for-granted assumptions of how things work in the organization.

Statement 12: “I feel very little loyalty to DES”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
I feel very little loyalty to DES	9	6	3	3	5	2	0	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

Asked if they felt very little loyalty to the organization, 18 respondents (64%) disagreed at some level. The most responses went to a very strong disagreement, yet a fourth of respondents agreed to some degree, having very little loyalty to the organization. This number, added to the neutral responses, reaches a 36% (10 members) who feel loyalty to the organization is not something they consider highly. What is interesting is to find that three of the five respondents who no longer work at DES agreed at some level they feel very little loyalty to the organization. This can be interpreted as they do not feel the need to worry about loyalty since they are no longer part of the group, but is difficult to infer if this is the case or if there was little loyalty even when they were active members. Parallel to this, from the seven respondents (25%) who agreed in some way to having little loyalty four are currently working in the organization. The three neutral responses also are from active members. This last piece of information shows 25% of the active members responding to the questionnaire feel little loyalty to the organization. The key phrase “very little loyalty” narrows the members’ perception to a more specific feeling, yet the responses (i.e., as shown in the initial part of this statement’s section) show approximately a fourth of members’ responses oppose the loyalty trend so far shown by the study. This seems a high number, though overall, this statement follows the same trend as other statements eliciting loyalty perceptions (4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 15).

Statement 13: “I would describe DES as a large “family” in which most members feel a sense of belonging”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
I would describe DES as a large “family” in which most members feel a sense of belonging	0	0	1	5	5	10	7	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

This question looks to elicit a comparison with what respondents believe a family is. The answers should reflect then a level of emotional closeness to the organization and the rest of the members. 25% of the positive responses very strongly agreed this statement reflected their sentiment. One-third of respondents (10/36%) strongly agreed, and five (18%) just agreed. The difference in levels of agreement may be influenced by each respondent’s perception of the concept of family. Having further detail of these perceptions can provide better insight into how it is that respondents are defining the relationship between family and DES. Some may idealize the concept of family, thus disagreeing with the comparison. Others may perceive a family as a normally dysfunctional group, similar to what they experience at work.

Organizations are affected by problems of integration at an internal level that include such things as language, boundaries, power relationships, intimacy, rewards and punishments, and ideology (Schein, 1984). Each of these, defined on its own, can diagnose possible integration problems, in which individuals fail to find common understandings and develop basic underlying assumptions that can simulate a familial environment. Corresponding with a sense of belonging, statement 8 somewhat confirms the notion of commonality amongst members in DES. Responses allow for the assumption that members feel they have a familial relationship with others in the group. Although 39% (11) of respondents disagreed or remained neutral to the notion that their organization can be perceived as a large family, it would be interesting to find out more about the existence of possible groups within the organization that may have evolved naturally within, and have members that identify amongst

themselves more than with others. The existence of formal groups such as the Online Learning group, or the software production area may have influenced this type of subgroups.

Statement 14: “I find it easy to identify with DES”

Statement \ Rating Scale	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Total
I find it easy to identify with DES	0	0	0	2	9	9	8	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

With an overwhelming 93% (26), respondents agreed in finding it easy to identify with the organization. Only two respondents remained neutral. These two respondents are currently working at DES. Possibly, deeper understanding of what this statement means can be achieved through a comparison with other similar statements. By itself, the responses show a general consensus of identification with the organization. This statement could be considered the embodiment of the entire questionnaire. Asking how identified you feel with the organization in a self-identification questionnaire may seem obvious to some, yet this statement helps to strengthen the underlying assumptions that the rest of the statements seek to invoke. Adding the word “easy” helps narrow the respondents’ feelings furthermore, and could also help differentiate trends and assumptions if the questionnaire’s responses were to be more polarizing. In this particular case, the statement only reflects the sense of strong identification seen throughout this analysis.

Statement 15: “I really care about the fate of DES”

Following the same trend as the previous statement, there were no negative responses. 25 respondents agreed at different levels (89%) that they cared about the future of the organization. 11% (3) remained indifferent to DES’s progress. This statement invites a deeper exploration to find out more about what it means to care about the fate of the organization. The statement is somewhat vague; to an extent it does not provide more information about respondents’ feelings if any situation should occur that greatly impacts the current structure of DES. Something that the statement analysis cannot infer, is if the respondents answered thinking that they would see themselves as part of the organization in the

future; and if the sentiment of caring is independent to them staying or not as members of the organization. Is it probably a safe assumption that those who answered neutrally do not see themselves working in DES in the short or mid-term future? All three of the neutral responses came from individuals who are currently active members of the organization.

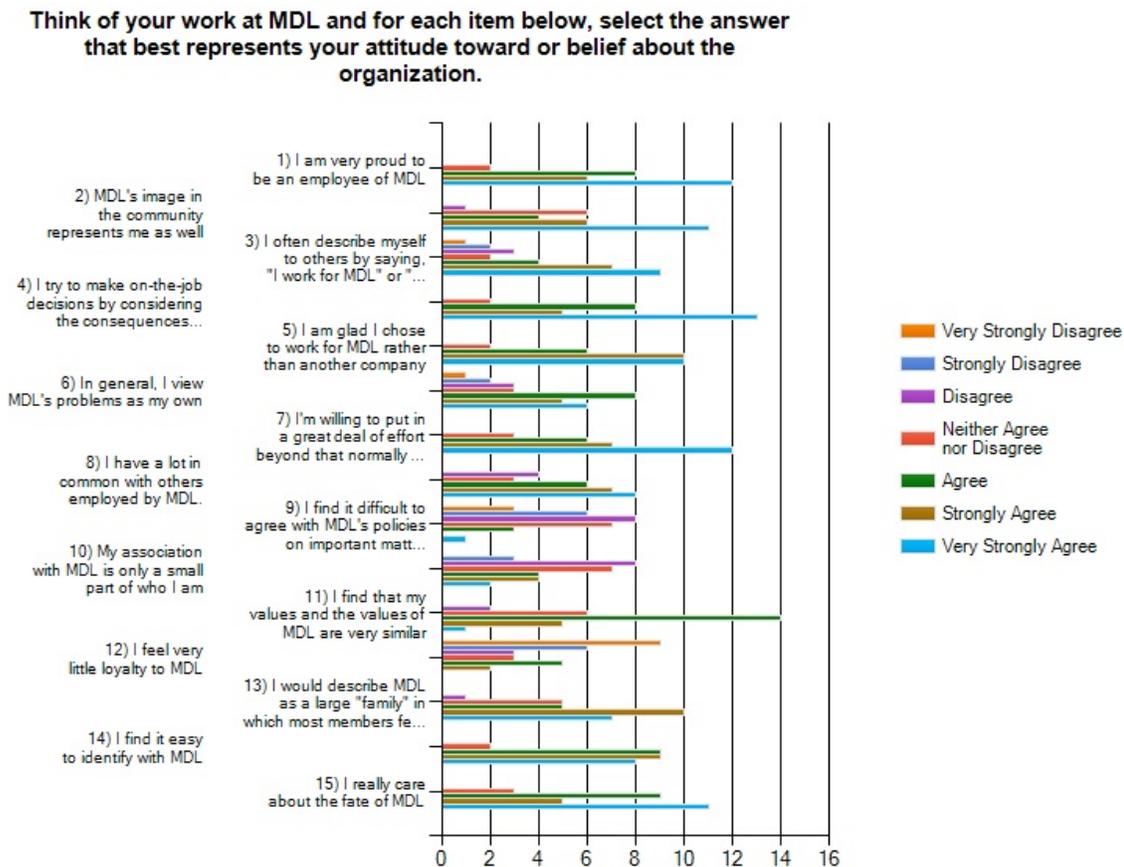


Figure 5. Self-identification questionnaire response distribution

### Clustering: statement comparison findings

Clustering the statements into categories permitted the study to reinforce perceptions from the responses collected, as well as find about possible mismatches between statements eliciting similar answers. Each statement is identified with the number in which it was ordered in the questionnaire, and was analyzed a second time and paired with those in the same category.

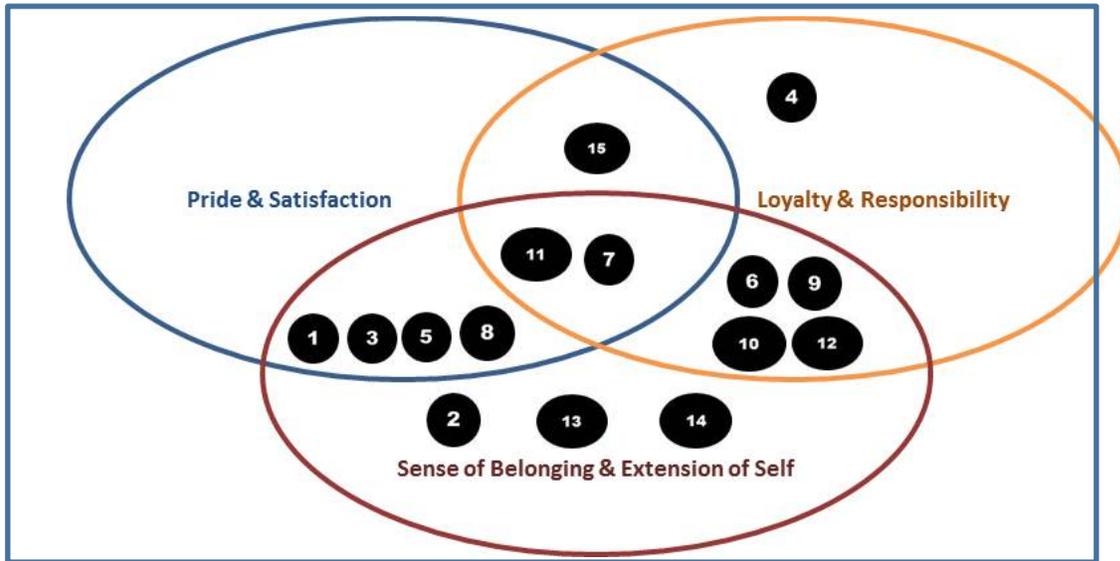


Figure 6. Self-identification questionnaire statement distribution in identified clusters

### Pride and satisfaction

Answer Options	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Count
1) I am very proud to be an employee of DES	0	0	0	2	8	6	12	28
3) I often describe myself to others by saying, "I work for DES" or "I am from DES"	1	2	3	2	4	7	9	28
5) I am glad I chose to work for DES rather than another company	0	0	0	2	6	10	10	28
8) I have a lot in common with others employed by DES.	0	0	4	3	6	7	8	28

VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree

Table 2. Pride & Satisfaction cluster response distribution

Respondents confirm having a high sense of pride and are satisfied of their decision to work for DES. The lack of disagreements in statements 1 and 5 suppose this argument can be sustained as a true one. Satisfaction levels have a higher number by concentrating most responses in the strongly agree and very strongly agree ratings, and although not necessarily confirmed, larger numbers selecting only “agree” as a rating of statement 1 might suggest that satisfaction can be differentiated amongst members’ perspectives. There may be the satisfaction of just being in a work environment that best suits their needs, and not necessarily having the same feeling about the organization itself. This proposition is really not well sustained by the numbers on the table, yet small differences in scale distribution might provide further research options about the organization’s culture strength.

Statements 3 and 8 offer discrepancies worth. Statement 8 shows 4 respondents disagreeing with having a lot in common with other members in DES. This disagreement may not precisely establish there is an antagonistic nature to their disagreement, rather than just expressing that “a lot” maybe more than what they think is enough to agree or remain neutral. Having presented this possibility, it is also worth considering that there may be some members within these four (maybe all) that really do not feel they have anything in common with their colleagues, besides just the workplace.

Statement 3 is the most interesting one to analyze because it ties to the initial breakdown the visible artifacts. The SITS website analysis raised the question of whether members of DES referred to themselves as being part of DES and not its parent organization, SITS. This question arose from the lack of reference about DES in sources accessible by external individuals or entities that want to know more about what the organization does. Going only by the artifacts, DES is not only unknown outside its walls, but it might even be concealed for other reasons. This last statement is not intended to have a dramatic effect, but only to question what those reasons might be, if existent. Responses of statement 3 can be related to the way members present themselves to others referring to SITS as parent organization, or even Online Learning as a subdivision of DES. It would be interesting to compare the same statement changing both of these in a replica of the questionnaire.

### Loyalty and responsibility

Answer Options	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Count
4) I try to make on-the-job decisions by considering the consequences of my actions for DES	0	0	0	2	8	5	13	28
6) In general, I view DES's problems as my own	1	2	3	3	8	5	6	28
7) I'm willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help DES become successful.	0	0	0	3	6	7	12	28
9) I find it difficult to agree with DES's policies on important matters relating to me	3	6	8	7	3	0	1	28
10) My association with DES is only a small part of who I am	0	3	8	7	4	4	2	28
12) I feel very little loyalty to DES	9	6	3	3	5	2	0	28
15) I really care about the fate of DES	0	0	0	3	9	5	11	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

Table 3. Loyalty & Responsibility cluster response distribution

Statements 4, 7, and 15 depict an alert sense of the organization’s longevity, and suggest individual decisions at work are being thought out in advance to maintain DES in good standing with

external individuals and entities. Larger concentrations of respondents, based on these statements, feel very strongly about caring for the organization's image. Discrepancies in sentiment appear with the interpretation of the rest of the statements in this category. Although there is a high sense of concern for the organization's status, members seem to reach a point where they feel the organization has less priority than other things. These statements, reviewed together, show the loyalty and responsibility exists toward the organization. However, there is a ceiling to these sentiments because of avoiding setting up themselves as unconditional or extreme loyalists that may demand more time and effort from them in the future. Statement 10 seems to provide an understanding of this situation. More than a third of respondents, and almost equally to those disagreeing, think that their relationship with the organization is only a part of their lives. The idea of unconditional support might be perceived as hindering other areas that make up their individuality. This sentiment might also help contextualize statement 6, creating a distinction between what respondents feel they can accept as limit with regards of owing the organization's problems. It can be safe to assume that individuals are almost always reluctant to feel responsible for issues they did not create or contribute to create. The loyalty and responsibility to the organization can only go as far as the tolerance threshold members are willing to withstand. Statement 9 can be difficult to analyze in comparison to any of the others if there is no specific policy that may show general discontent. Although four people think some policies may need to change, the policies in which they disagree on with the organization may not be the same ones. This possibility weakens concerns about having these disagreements be a threat to the organizational structure and performance.

## Sense of belonging and extension of self

Answer Options	VSD	SD	D	NA/D	A	SA	VSA	Count
1) I am very proud to be an employee of DES	0	0	0	2	8	6	12	28
2) DES's image in the community represents me as well	0	0	1	6	4	6	11	28
3) I often describe myself to others by saying, "I work for DES" or "I am from DES"	1	2	3	2	4	7	9	28
6) In general, I view DES's problems as my own	1	2	3	3	8	5	6	28
8) I have a lot in common with others employed by DES.	0	0	4	3	6	7	8	28
9) I find it difficult to agree with DES's policies on important matters relating to me	3	6	8	7	3	0	1	28
10) My association with DES is only a small part of who I am	0	3	8	7	4	4	2	28
11) I find that my values and the values of DES are very similar	0	0	2	6	14	5	1	28
12) I feel very little loyalty to DES	9	6	3	3	5	2	0	28
13) I would describe DES as a large "family" in which most members feel a sense of belonging	0	0	1	5	5	10	7	28
14) I find it easy to identify with DES	0	0	0	2	9	9	8	28
VSD=Very Strongly Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NA/D=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, VSA=Very Strongly Agree								

Table 4. Sense of Belonging & Extension of Self cluster response distribution

This category includes a larger amount of questions due to the significance with regards to the entire questionnaire. Self-identifying with the organization can be construed as feeling a high sense of belonging from a member to such organizational culture. Statements 1, 3, and 8, relate to pride (as shown in the first category) and also help identify a sense of belonging by construing proud behavior to be a confirmation of wanting to be part of the organization. Statement 2 is not included in any of the previous categories and it addresses the respondents' perceptions of the organization as an extension of their personality. Participants, for the most part, agreed with this statement, reinforcing the sense of pride and satisfaction from the previously mentioned statements. Interestingly enough, six neutral responses and one disagreement represent one fourth of the respondents not ready to admit that the organization's image is an extension of their own. This sense of representation touches on other statements to a certain degree. For example, statements 2 and 11 show the same amount of neutrality. Looking at the same number does not mean, until analyzing each respondent's answers, that they are the same group. However, the degree of neutrality in both statements is amongst the higher ones in all 15 statements, which shows that there is a sizable group of members that do not perceive the organization as an extension of themselves.

Statement 3, also part of the “Pride and Satisfaction,” shares identifiable characteristics with statements eliciting sentiments of belonging and extension of self. The trend continues to show small discrepancies between this statement and others attempting to stimulate a similar feeling. There is a difference in perception between statements 2 and 3, for example. Although most respondents agreed DES’s image represents their image as well to the community, there are a few who would not state they work for the organization. There seems to be a perception gap between DES as an extension of themselves and stating they work for DES. The discrepancies, as small as they may be, do reflect there may be an underlying assumption about the identity relation between DES and its parent organization, SITS.

## Conclusion

This research was motivated by the interest in improving the current organizational culture and member relationships in DES. In Schein's definition of organizational culture (1984), an organization's survival relies in its ability to adapt to its internal and external environment dynamics. As the title of this research suggest, there has to be a first step taken to build a solid assessment of an organization's cultural strength. Throughout the development of this investigation, key terms and concepts were defined and organized to create a theoretical background that could explain the rationale for this initial step. Schein's definition provided a robust foundation to guide this research in identifying the path to assess DES cultural strength by means of focusing on its visible artifacts and underlying assumptions.

Borrowing from organizational behavior researchers, this study was able to establish a process by which it was possible to perform a rhetorical analysis of existing artifacts and survey results on organizational identification. Such analyses were expected to provide a better interpretation of how strong the organizational culture is in DES. The visible artifacts, on one hand, would help the research not only to identify a list of organizational items and resources available; but also to help clarify DES' organizational structure and institutional positioning within the university. On the other, the questionnaire would help detect some of those underlying assumptions through DES members' perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.

Looking back at the research questions, the research was able to find that the employees with less than three-month experience perceive DES as a strong culture (RQ1 & 3), and show a high sense of loyalty, responsibility, and willingness to contribute to the organization's success. This trend builds to the one from those who have been working for more than the months already, and also show high feelings of loyalty, responsibility, satisfaction, and pride (RQ 2 & 4). The visible artifacts did challenge the notion of strong culture (RQ 5) by presenting some contradicting information about DES. The overall interpretation is that DES has a weak meaning even to those who work within it. However, the strength

of the culture is evident mostly by identifying DES through its parent organization, SITS. Perhaps it is in this organization that the culture strength had more meaning to members. Still, DES is perceived to have a strong organizational culture. The organizational identification questionnaire provided a good idea of how members are inclined to have a positive attitude toward their organization. The survey analysis showed a continuous trend that confirms a high sense of belonging and extension of self, a high and positive sense of pride and satisfaction, and a high and positive sense of loyalty and responsibility. No major negative trends were found on the survey's side, which means DES membership enjoys a healthy relationship overall.

Even with a strong identification from its membership, the analysis of visible artifacts did present some interesting information in specific areas that could affect the organization's ability to improve or adapt in the future. At a macro level, DES is an organizational subculture within three larger structures: SITS, VP-C, and the university. As defined by the Website analysis, SITS is considered the parent organization that has immediate impact on DES' organizational culture. The VP-C, parent organization of SITS, seems to be more distanced from DES membership behavior. The university is the larger organization, and has a more direct impact in SITS and DES through the alignment of mission and vision described in DES' strategic plan. This hierarchy of organizations is not as clearly documented in the available artifacts, and may create some confusion amongst members of DES and its parent organizations. One potential result is the isolation of most DES members with exception of a few that are bridge to SITS, VP-C, and the university. It can also mean that DES membership is unable to assess its role within the larger picture, risking its ability to adapt and survive. A specific example can be the duplication of services. Although DES is the only organization addressing online learning, there are other entities that offer support on the use of technology for instruction, which might mean there is no need to consider DES as solution provider.

Another problem the current organizational hierarchy presents is the branding of the smaller organization. The analysis showed there is no DES branding per se. It is mostly SITS that enjoys recognition for DES productivity. This is not necessarily a problem, but as a group with its own organizational culture, DES depends on recognition that SITS receives.

The situation requires a less complex organizational structure. The current status might evolve and DES, as the smaller organization, can get absorbed by a larger structure (i.e., SITS). Or perhaps, SITS may evolve and redefine its organizational culture. The truth is this decision will be guided by the larger organizational structures like the VP-C and the university.

#### Future research

As an initial step, this research was able to gather and analyze information that could establish a good understanding of the current organizational culture in DES. It also provided a first assessment of the identification members feel toward their organization. This portion of the research is where I accept how humbling it is to spend hours gathering, and more hours analyzing the information in order to touch the surface of what assessing an organization's cultural strength means. I do feel that the methodology has great potential. It needs refinement of course, and considerable more amount of data. The theoretical background can definitely be broadened to include more and most current research about organizational communication, culture, identification, and so on. The research questions can be drafted to be more precise and allow the research to better scaffold the information it needs. I now realize it can greatly benefit if we include a question that focus on the organizational leadership. DES, being the smaller of several organizations, depends on its leadership to maintain a solid relationship with the parent organizations.

The self-identification questionnaire provided the most data of all the tools used. It produced very good information for analysis, and adapting it to the specific study could provide much more useful data. Adaptations could expand on some statements that can build on the existing ones to clarify some of

the key words they had. For example, caring about the organization can be further analyzed by incorporating situational information. (e.g., the future of DES is important to me, even if I am no longer part of the organization). It was challenging to validate the responses. Categories were decided to narrow the comparison between statements and to be able to provide a better flow of information presented in the research. The categories seemed to have provided a good way of comparing statement numbers, but they ended up being more difficult to create because of the flexibility of the analysis. Statements kept being changed to match their location in the diagram all the way through the research, which means the initial assessment requires refinement. Meaning given to words and phrases in the questionnaire became challenging because there were no pre-determined categories to cluster them in. These categories were defined by key words or word relations in each of the statements. Perhaps a more formal semantic analysis (i.e., Latent Semantic Analysis) can produce a more robust set of categories, and probably a more accurate one as well.

The methodology can include additional data gathering instruments such as recorded interviews or open-ended questionnaires that permit members to expand on questions that surface those underlying assumptions we sought to find. The questionnaire was sent to organization's members during a time of internal adjustment. There were changes in the internal structure of the organization took place that was considered to affect the respondents as well as their responses. Of course, the dynamics of the organization affect its culture so the idea was to take a snapshot of what the current situation was. The gathered information provided the opportunity to further explore the underlying assumptions if done with more refined research tools and methods. It would benefit the research to expand information about the organization's members to include interviews that can produce clearer data through rhetorical analysis. Doing so can provide insight on what new workers think, feel and perceive, as well as from those who left. Refining the research will also allow the possibility of expanding the research outside the organization, and find what the perception of external entities is about the organization's behavior.

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## Appendix

### Organizational Identification Questionnaire (administered via Survey Monkey)

We appreciate your time and participation in this organizational culture assessment study. During this 16-question survey you will be asked to provide, to the best of your knowledge, the answer best describes the perception/feelings toward your organization. By completing this survey you agree to participate in this research and understand your participation in it. Any questions you may have, please contact the Primary Investigator (Didier Hernandez) at (915) 443-8520. Think of your work at DES and for each item below, select the answer that best represents your attitude toward or belief about the organization. Only question number 1 will require for you to type a number.

1 = agree very strongly	3 = disagree
6 = agree strongly	2 = disagree strongly
5 = agree	1 = disagree very strongly
4 = neither agree nor disagree	

1. I have been part of DES for \_\_\_\_\_ years/months.
2. I am very proud to be an employee of DES.
3. DES's image in the community represents me as well.
4. I often describe myself to others by saying, "I work for DES." or "I am from DES."
5. I try to make on-the-job decisions by considering the consequences of my actions for DES.
6. I am glad I chose to work for DES rather than another company.
7. In general, I view DES's problems as my own.
8. I'm willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help DES become successful.
9. I have a lot in common with others employed by DES.
10. I find it difficult to agree with DES's policies on important matters relating to me.
11. My association with DES is only a small part of who I am.
12. I find that my values and the values of DES are very similar.
13. I feel very little loyalty to DES.
14. I would describe DES as a large "family" in which most members feel a sense of belonging.
15. I find it easy to identify with DES.
16. I really care about the fate of DES.

## **Vita**

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