How does the organizational culture of two teachers’ unions working in one community influence their relationship with district school boards, union members and the public?

by

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Educational Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
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Abstract

Organizational culture: we often hear about an organization’s culture - either positive or negative, and sometimes identify an organization's success or failure to that culture. But what is organizational culture? How is it created and sustained? What factors contribute most significantly to its development? This research is a result of my interest in the variations in organizational culture that I experienced while working in Canadian secondary schools, where different teacher unions represented teaching staffs. As a result of these experiences I wondered, could each union’s organizational culture be the reason for the differences in approach that the unions assume when interacting with school boards, their membership and the public?

As a result of this research, my original contribution to knowledge is the identification of five factors that contribute significantly to the creation and maintenance of strong organizational culture. These include: The ability of an organization to develop, articulate and implement a set of a few core non-negotiable values, which provide a framework for all of their work; an organization’s use of a shared language; a personal system of clear and concise communications that flows directly from the leadership team through to the membership; the presence of trusting relationships within the organization; strong organizational memory fostered by the sharing of stories.
This study focused on two teacher unions who represented teachers in one community in Ontario. Research was conducted through a case study of each organization, which included 8 interviews and a review of documents, over a 4-month time frame. This work is important to union executives, educators, administrators, and policy makers who function in unionized environments. But, ultimately, the objective of educational research is to determine those processes and practices that help to create effective schools in order to support the educational needs of all students. It is my hope that this research can further the development of collaborative union and district school board organizational cultures, so that together they place student achievement at the forefront of their agendas.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

In his book *Great by Choice* Jim Collins wrote, “We don’t choose study questions. They choose us” (Collins, 2011, p. 5). His search to discover what makes good organizations great was driven by a desire to better understand the complexity of large business. Likewise, after working in Ontario’s education system for over twenty years, I have questions about teacher unions; this curiosity heightened after changing jobs five years ago and moving from interacting with one union, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association (OECTA), to working with the Ontario Secondary School Teacher’s Federation (OSSTF). My experience working with these two different teachers’ unions made me realize that each had a unique culture. I began to wonder about the elements that contributed to the organizational culture of each union who represented teachers within a city, which will be referred to as Dawson Ontario within this study.

The culture of an organization has been described as the “normative glue” (Siehl, 1983) that binds a group’s shared basic assumptions. These assumptions influence organizational behavior beyond structural controls, procedures and authority (O'Reilly, 1991). This research is a result of my interest in the variations in organizational culture that I experienced while working in secondary schools, where different teacher unions represented teaching staffs. As a result of these experiences I wondered, could each union’s organizational culture be the reason for the differences in approach that unions assumed when interacting with school boards, their membership and the public?

The benefits and disadvantages of teacher unions have been debated with strong opinions forming on both sides of the discussion. Although there are many issues, voices, and perspectives within the dialogue, there is little current research that looks at the culture of Ontario’s teachers’ unions. Because of commonalities in their purpose, organizational structure, and method of operation, it could be concluded that teacher unions have similar cultures. But studies have shown that organizations engaged in similar work can have vast differences in their values and culture (O'Reilly, 1991).

This study will focus on two secondary school teacher unions representing teachers who work in the Catholic and Public district school boards in the community of Dawson Ontario: the District
25 union chapter of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation, which will be referred to in this document as District 25, and the Dawson union chapter of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Federation, which will be called Dawson OECTA. The purpose of the study is to uncover the underlying values and basic assumptions that frame each union’s work. By revealing the unions’ organizational culture, I hope to provide union members with an appreciation of the cultural foundations of their representative bodies. In addition, this research will afford union leaders a deeper understanding of their organization and of other teachers’ unions operating in their district. Furthermore, this study will help boards of education and the public understand the cultural traits of each union, as well as providing them with a more complete view of teacher unions guiding principals and processes. For all stakeholders, I hope that contributing to a better understanding of teacher union cultural influences will help unions and district school boards work together towards improving academic outcomes for Ontario’s students.

**Research Questions**

This thesis will delve into the organizational culture of two secondary school teacher unions in an investigation of how organizational culture influences relationships. The overarching question is: How does the organizational culture of two teachers’ unions working in one community influence their interactions with district school boards, union members and the public?

This question will be broken down further to include the following sub-questions:

- What are the cultural artifacts: the organizational rituals, language, stories and environmental patterns that help define each union?
- What are the cultural values and norms: the social obligations, organizational goals, group rules, policies and procedures of the union? How have they been established, and how are they maintained?
- What are the basic underlying taken-for-granted assumptions that the organization is founded on? How do each of these elements: artifacts, values, and assumptions, impact how teachers’ unions relate to their district school board, their members and the public?
Chapter 2
Literature Review

Ontario’s teacher unions are organized in a unique manner within Canada; four teacher unions operate under an association known as the Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF), yet each acts independent of one another. In Ontario, all teachers practicing in the publicly funded education system must belong to a union. Teachers have no choice in union affiliation. The district school board employer--Catholic or Public, French or English--and the educational panel--elementary or secondary--determines a teacher’s union relationship.

All students in Ontario, both Catholic and non-Catholic can attend a Catholic Secondary School. Yet Catholic school boards have a right to hire teachers who are committed to the “values, goals and obligations of the Catholic education system” (Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association). Teacher unions have formed in Ontario based on these distinct educational groupings. All teachers teaching in an English Catholic elementary or secondary school have the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA) as their representative union. All secondary school teachers, teaching in Ontario’s public system have the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF)/Fédération des enseignantes – en seignants des écoles secondaires de l’Ontario (FEESO) as their representative union. Each Catholic and public district school board has its own group of publicly elected school trustees.

Ontario teachers began to form unionized structures in the early 1900’s. The labor movement along with the suffragette cause helped advance the unionization of Ontario’s education system, which was cemented in 1944 when the Teaching Profession Act made union participation mandatory for Ontario’s Teachers (Gauthier, 2012). Each union carries out its mandate under the direction of its membership. Canadian studies show that teacher unions are concerned with a wide range of interests, from those of teacher working conditions and wages, through to professional development of teaching staff and the broader interests of a publicly supported education system (Poole, 2000). The unions complete this work within a traditional organizational structure of executives, standing committees, councils and working groups (Lawton, 1999).

Although union membership is compulsory in Ontario, some teachers are ambivalent about
union participation, while others are strongly committed to union goals (Poole, 2000). This variance in what teachers want from their unions can be attributed to a number of factors: unions can appear to focus on a narrow range of issues; union membership ranges in age from those who are older and remember the struggles of the past for fair wages and working conditions, to those who are young and have differing values and concerns; unions are under constant attack from the media and government making those who are active participants in union activities targets (Bascia, 2008). But although all teachers may not embrace union activism, most understand that “when disparaged by politicians, administrators, or the press, they not only want someone to defend them, they want someone to challenge the prevailing antieducation, antiteacher rhetoric by providing alternative, positive, persuasive images of teaching and schooling” (Bascia, 2008, p. 102). Teacher unions therefore act not only as teachers’ agents by negotiating contracts and working conditions, but they also play another significant role, which is to act as promoters and upholders of Ontario’s public education system (Lawton, 1999).

While traditional organizational theory looks at the division of work within an establishment from a coordination perspective (March, 1966), modern organizational theory also takes into account the culture that determines the interactions between individuals and groups within the structure for a more complete picture of the inner workings of any large organization (Morgan, 2006, Senge, 1990, Shedd, 1991). As Hargreaves points out in his work on restructuring organizations, both structure and culture help to shape the manner in which work is completed within an organization (Hargreaves, 1994). Organizational structure provides the framework by which articulated goals can be implemented and achieved. But it is those cultural factors of “rooted beliefs, practices and working relationships” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 62) that have significant influence on organizational effectiveness.

Organizational Culture

The concept of organizational culture is a more recent notion in organizational management study. In the early 1950’s researchers began to include organizational climate and culture as aspects of their work. In 1951 Jaques identified culture as a shared way of thinking among factory workers (Jaques, 1951). Pettigrew expanded this idea by specifying that culture included not only accepted meanings but also the terms, forms, categories and images with which a member uses to associate within a group (Pettigrew, 1979). With continued refinement of the
term organizational culture, researchers began to develop models and methods for identifying culture within groups.

Schein’s Model of Culture: Artifacts Values and Assumptions
Schein’s model of culture has three elements: artifacts, values and assumptions (Schein, 1984, 2010). From this model, others have defined specific items within each element. Hatch further categorizes artifacts into physical artifacts, including an organization’s logo design, building décor, expected dress and appearance, material objects present in the workplace and physical layout of working areas (Hatch, 1993). She also identifies behavioral artifacts, such as ceremonies and rituals, communication patterns, traditions, rewards and punishments, along side verbal artifacts such as jokes, jargon, nicknames, heroes and villains, and metaphors within the pieces of visible artifacts that can be used to gauge an organization’s culture (Hatch, 1993).

Some organizational values are based on the ‘cultural assumptions’, which are those taken-for-granted beliefs that underpin the organizations actions (Schein, 1984). These can be difficult to uncover and are highly resistant to change. But it is these deeply held beliefs that are often at the root of organizational behavior. The behaviors frequently become so ingrained in the organization’s culture that group members are unaware of the initial condition that precipitated the behavior:

As a value leads to a behavior, and as that behavior begins to solve the problem which prompted it in the first place, the value gradually is transformed into an underlying assumption about how things really are. As the assumption is increasingly taken for granted, it drops out of awareness. Taken-for-granted assumptions are so powerful because they are less debatable and confrontable than espoused values. (Schein, 1984, p. 4)

The process of developing organizational assumptions slowly develops over time, therefore the uncovering of these can only take place by exposing key paradigms around an organization’s primary beliefs: is the organization’s view of humanity’s relationship with nature one of dominance, submission or is it harmonizing? Is the organization’s view of human nature one where they see humans as basically good, basically evil, or do they believe humans have the ability to work towards perfection? What personality characteristics are preferred? Who are the
organization’s heroes and who are their villains? Is the organization’s view of human activity one of passive acceptance, active opposition, or does the organization encourage their members to participate in ongoing development? How does the organization define what is work and what is play? What types of human relationships are fostered: cooperative, competitive, collaborative, individualistic or communal? These attributes become important because, once established the beliefs “are so thoroughly learned that they come to be a stable element of the groups life” (Schein, 1984, p. 10).

Other organizational values are those that are “debatable, overt and espoused” (Schein, 1984, p. 4). This type of value differs from cultural assumptions in that assumptions can only be uncovered when an insider or outsider asks the right questions. Espoused values develop as groups attempt to survive in an environment, and often are an attempt to reduce anxiety within that environment. Espoused values are reflected in an organization’s goals, strategies, norms, and processes that have proven to be effective enough to pass on to new members (Schein, 1984). Thus in the Schein model, the overt expression of culture as seen in artifacts and espoused values, coupled with the organizations deep rooted underlying assumptions combine to create the singularity known as organizational culture.

Integration, Differentiation and Fragmentation

Early organizational theorists developed concepts around the formation of organizational culture. Those that adopted the integration concept held that culture developed as a result of values expressed by upper management. This culture was then passed down to others as managers hired staff that held similar values and opinions (Martin, 2004). Critics of this approach argue that it is unlikely that any large organization would be able to demonstrate this consistency of purpose (Martin, 2004).

The differentiation view of organizational culture identifies the presence of subcultures that often arise due to the different values found in hierarchical levels, genders, job descriptions, age groups, ethnicities etc. These subcultures can have entirely different values from other groups within the same organization (Trice, 2011). The differentiation theory is also considered an overly simplistic model of a complex phenomenon (Martin, 2004).
A more practical account of how organizational culture is developed and maintained is presented in the idea of fragmentation. The fragmentation perspective states that alignments made between organizational members based on their particular interpretation of an issue or event are fluid and temporary:

To the extent that consensus exists, it is issue-specific and transient: problems or issues get activated, generate positive and negative reactions, and then fade from attention as other issues take center stage, creating temporary, issue-specific networks of connection that disappear and reconfigure themselves in a constant flux.

(Martin, 2004, pg. 10)

Organizational theorist Mats Alvesson argues that all organizational cultures are a complex interweaving of “cultural manifestations of different levels and kinds” (Alvesson, 2013, p. 190) that arise from the variety of job tasks, socio-economic groupings, national cultures, industrial cultures, professional cultures, and so on within an organization. To identify a singular culture, or static subcultures within an organization, is not only impossible; it is erroneous. When studying organizational culture, instances of all three methods of organizational alliances will most likely emerge. Some values and opinions will be articulated by management and held by a majority of members. Other values will be adopted by subgroups, and some beliefs will be held by alliances that form and disband in ever changing formations (Martin, 2004). These groupings and regroupings in of themselves become an aspect of the organizational culture.

Group Aspects of Organizational Culture
Several factors affect the group features of organizational culture. The addition of or retirement of group members influences both behavioral norms and group beliefs (Trice, 2011). When new members join the group, they learn about the culture from the stories, language and behavior of existing members. In this manner “all organizational members, by virtue of their interactions, help develop or sustain it” (Trice, 2011, p. 36). Culture is an expression of the collective, both past and present. It is a dynamic element. The impact factors that sway organizational culture is known as ‘cultural traffic’, which encompasses a mix of “ideas, concepts, meanings etc. from a
variety of outside sources” (Alvesson, 2013, p. 208). Because of this range of influences on a group, other characteristics of organizational culture emerge including the evolutionary nature of a group’s formation and change, the impacting nature of new and existing members, and the power of social norms and conditions of the time.

A blend of cultural contributors creates a complex set of norms, some visible when articulated in documents such as operations manuals, member handbooks and newsletters, or displayed in the manner in which people dress, speak and communicate with each other. Others are imperceptible when viewed superficially, but revealed upon questioning or through an ongoing observation of activity or documents (Trice, 2011). Through ongoing interactions, members both respond to and generate organizational culture, which slowly evolves around the foundational framework of the organizations values, artifacts and assumptions.

Teacher Union Relationships with District School Boards
Teacher unions interact with district school boards based on the agreed upon processes that are defined within their joint collective agreement. Webb describes the collective agreement as “a body of rules intended to regulate among other things the terms of employment contracts. Thus collective bargaining is itself essentially a rule-making process”, whereby the “collective will” of employees is brought forward to the employer and a contract is made that abides by the rules that have been agreed upon by both the union and the employer (Flanders, 1968, pp. 4, 5). In engaging in collective bargaining, unions enter into a “power relationship” (Flanders, 1968, p. 6) with their employer where both sides utilize the power of their work or refusal to work in the case of strike action, or the denial of work in the case of a lockout, to push forward their group’s petitions.

Teacher unions engage in collective bargaining in order to reach agreements with school boards around wages, benefits, teacher preparation time, length of the school day, alternate supervision requirements, and class size and reporting, to name a few. Some collective agreements also include details around teacher choice of assessment tool, teacher participation in learning team activities, and teacher parent contact time, which many consider to be management rights (Lieberman, 2000). In Ontario, collective agreements are negotiated on two levels: both centrally between the provincial government and all of Ontario’s teachers unions, and locally between individual teachers’ unions and their associated district school board. Collective agreement items
such as wages, benefits and class size are negotiated at the provincial level central bargaining table, and items such as staff meetings, additional teacher’s duties, supervisions, and voluntary leaves, are agreed upon during local negotiations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

Unions also represent teachers using contractually defined grievance procedures when there is a difference of opinion around the application or interpretation of the collective agreement. These critical processes ensure that negotiated contract elements are not violated and that unfair practices and improper sanctions are not used against teachers (Lawton, 1999). Other practical working conditions that are negotiated by teacher unions are items such as teacher work load, health and safety considerations, legal representation, economic issues - including teaching resources, salary and benefits, and representation in educational decision making (Bascia, 1994). With this extensive slate of job responsibilities, unions often find themselves under attack by governments, media and members of the general public who believe their influence is too far reaching. Although governments and media choose to criticize union actions, union advocacy has resulted in fair wages, improved teaching and learning conditions for both teachers and students, and an acknowledgment of the societal importance of the teaching profession:

> Working conditions, salary, and benefits are fundamental to which and how many individuals are attracted to and remain in particular occupations and settings, so it is ironic that politicians and the press often view teacher unions’ concerns with compensation as “self-interested” and “nonprofessional” (Bascia, 2008, p. 101)

Those who argue for limits to collective bargaining rights contend, “collective bargaining by public sector unions shares all of the important characteristics of political action and should be subject to legislation governing political action” (Lieberman, 2000, p. 4), while those who support teachers’ unions rights maintain:

> Union leaders have a belief system that values quality public education for its own sake because it is right for children and right for society; however, they also support quality public education because it provides the means to support the union and its members. The immediate self interests and the long term educational interests of teachers are interdependent and complementary. To accuse teacher unions of promoting their self
interests at the expense of education quality is to misunderstand the dynamics of the relationship between these apparently paradoxical interests and to construct the paradox through a simplistic lens. (Poole, 2000, p. 117)

In spite of defense or criticism of the collective bargaining process, it is widely supported by both unions and school boards alike. The system and resultant contracts form the basis of the relationship that exists between union members and their employers.

The work of teacher unions consists of “promoting better working conditions and compensation for their members” (Lawton, 1999, p. 63), offering opportunities for professional learning and development (Kerchner C. K., 2000), and the creation and backing of educational policy (Bascia, 1994). Unions use the collective bargaining process to secure improvements in working conditions. The rationale for trade union bargaining grew out of the need for craftsmen and skilled trade workers to have representation in the determination of wages and working conditions with their employers: “manual workers will stand at grave disadvantage if they do not command the services of an expert negotiator” (Webb, 1902, p. 181). As unionism grew in size from individual shops to towns, regions and industries, the scope of collective bargaining also expanded (Flanders, 1968).

Trade unions have evolved to represent a broader array of workers beyond those employed in industrial settings or in the skilled trades. Along with this change of membership, the scope of collective bargaining has transformed to include functions that had in the past been recognized as managerial in nature. It is not uncommon for collective agreements to include rules around transfers, lay-offs, retirements, promotions and employment termination (Flanders, 1968). In this way, bargaining becomes a regulator of management, and unions become partners in the managerial aspect of the organizational structure. This relationship is critical, in that both sides are challenged not only to prioritize their own goals, but also to work towards an agreement in a conciliatory manner when goals are significantly divergent. “A great deal of the complexity and beauty of collective bargaining involves the process of compromise and assessment of priorities within each side” (Dunlop, 1967, p. 173). The level of ‘diplomatic power’ required of trade unions to act in this capacity has compelled them to behave as professional political institutions (Flanders, 1968).
The interests of teachers’ unions sometimes seem conflicted and it may appear that there is a lack of internal union consensus around topics such as teacher participation in co-curricular and professional development activities, teacher accountability, local union representation at provincial level negotiations and the value of adversarial methods of conflict resolution (Johnson, 2000; Kerchner, 1997; Lieberman, 2000; Poole, 2000;). Yet the importance of teacher unions cannot go unnoticed. Teacher union activities effectively contribute to the development of educational policy and practice (Bascia, 2003). Teacher unions are uniquely situated to “construct a successor to industrial era education” (Kerchner C. K., 1997, p. 15), thereby advancing educational reform. As representatives of a large group of highly educated front line workers, teacher federations, working in consultation with their members, have an opportunity to become “co-creators of change on the broadest scale for a strong and just society in the future” (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 18).

Still, many teachers are indifferent about the usefulness of their unions (Bascia, 2005). Notwithstanding their recognition of the union’s protection of their rights and interests, “union strategies, in short, are visible to some teachers, valued by few, and irrelevant or obstructive to others” (p. 226). Unions can hinder educational reform initiatives and programs of staff development when they are not convinced that these programs will improve student outcomes (Bascia, 2005), or when they are making a political statement against governments who attempt to strip contract improvements (Lieberman, 2000). These job actions include working to rule and teacher strikes, or withdrawal of participation in voluntary co-curricular activities or non-participation in school improvement initiatives. Job action strategies are founded in an “industrial mind-set” (Kerchner C., 2000) that “organizes around vigorous representations of the differences between teachers and managers” (Kerchner C. K., 1993, p. 15). But, as union’s scope of influence is limited to areas that can be negotiated during the collective bargaining process, job action is often the only tool that a union has to bargain with.

As the educational community continues to adapt to pressures to create accountable progressive educational organizations, both unions and governments have been challenged to fine-tune their work to meet today’s obligations. Teacher unions are not unlike other large organizations that represent a diversity of membership. The varied expectations of their members, coupled with
their limited ability to react to imposed government directives leaves them reliant on using the collective bargaining process to push forward their members’ agendas. The organizational culture helps to determine what these priorities look like, and how the group approaches this work.

Conceptual Framework
In looking at organizational culture as a driver of organizational behavior, I will be exploring the ways in which unions exhibit organizational culture in their artifacts, values, and assumptions. Using Schein’s (Schein, 1984) model of the interaction between levels of culture as a foundation, I will endeavor to uncover the visible artifacts, articulated values, and the invisible basic assumptions that underlie the actions of union leaders. In addition, I will draw upon Martin’s (Martin, 2004) work in identifying instances of cultural integration, differentiation and fragmentation in the groupings that are evident within the organization. These groups will be revealed when examining the organization’s values. For example, if a union leader demonstrates that their beliefs align with those of the union’s publicly communicated goals, cultural integration would be evident. But if a leader expresses views that are not in alignment with broader union objectives, then further exploration would need to take place in order to determine if the culture of the union was one of differentiation, where there are a collection of distinct subcultures within the organization, or one of fragmentation where groups form and reform, making alliances for short periods of time depending on the issue at hand.
Figure 1. Adapted from Schein (1984)
Chapter 3
Methods

An exploratory case study method was used to investigate the culture of the two secondary teachers’ unions. This methodology allowed for a focused investigation of two separate “bounded systems” (Merriam, 2009) where each union organization was represented by one case.

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context.
(Yin, 1994, p. 13)

The phenomenon studied in each case was that of organizational culture. The context of this inquiry was bounded by the time of the study: a four-month period, and the context of that timeframe which included the working conditions of the union executives as they went about their work. Within this topic I studied the artifacts, values, and assumptions of each representative union organization. These elements were revealed through a combination of interviews, interviewer observations, and a review of documents including member handbooks, local and provincial union web site content, social media sites, and union procedure manuals.

“Case study is a design particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Because of the fluid nature of organizational culture, the case study method allowed for a holistic representation of the elusive organizational culture phenomenon.

Interview contributors from both union federations, were invited to participate in the study. Invitations to interview were sent to each union local’s president, chief negotiator, and staff representatives holding a variety of executive positions within the organization such as communications officer, counselor, and status of women representative. The initial invitation to participate was offered through a combination of personal phone calls and an introductory email. This was followed by a more comprehensive email after candidates had accepted the initial invitation, that included the participation agreement and interview tool. As executives from both unions published their contact information on public web sites, this initial step posed few obstacles. Personal connections to some of the potential interview participants allowed for a natural starting point to the investigation; this preliminary reach out to acquaintances was met
with a mix of positive and negative responses.

During the time of the study, all teachers’ unions in Ontario were engaged in contract negotiations with the province. The mood within schools had become increasingly strained as teachers throughout the province, including Dawson, began various forms of job action. When phone calls and emails to potential interview participants began to go unanswered, and with some interview participants who had initially accepted offers to participate backing out, I spoke with a trusted union involved friend for advice. A suggestion was made to pause my study for a time until bargaining issues were resolved and union executives were not as stressed for time. Taking this advice, I began to consider other ways that I might gather evidence. In discussion with my thesis advisor, I decided to consider information from social media that demonstrated both individual union executives opinions about the current labor situation, and the broader union and non-union perspective, found posted on publicly shared social media platforms. Throughout the timeframe of union and provincial negotiations, some of my intended interview participants openly expressed personal opinions about their union activities on Facebook and Twitter. I gathered this data during the studies hiatus, and it has been included with the document review evidence where applicable.

After a break of six months, during which time contracts were settled and job action stopped at the two secondary teacher unions being studied, I once again approached potential participants both by phone and email. This time, I met with a positive response. A total of 8 union officials from the community of Dawson were interviewed; 5 from OSSTF District 25, and 3 from Dawson OECTA. District 25 has 4 full time executives who have been fully released from their teaching duties in order to conduct union business. Dawson OECTA has 1 full time union executive released from teaching duties. The difference in the number of union executives interviewed in each organization reflects the difference in full time union staff employed in each local union organization.

Interviewees included the president of OSSTF District 25, the president of Dawson OECTA, and local union executive members from various union positions. All of the interviews took place in person, some in union offices, some at a school site, and some at restaurants or in the home of the interview participant. The interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed using a combination of voice to text software and manual text editing tools. Once
transcribed, data was sent to each interviewee for verification and correction in the case where the audio recording was inaudible. In each interview instance there were few errors in the initial transcribed documentation. None of the interviewees removed data or changed the text significantly. No participants withdrew from the study. All interviews were conducted over a four-month time frame so that the responses were gathered during similar working conditions.

Interview text data was analyzed using qualitative data analysis software. Each text transcript was coded based on thematic categories that emerged through the clustering of common topics such as communication patterns, rituals, heroes and villains, views of human relationships, and organizational goals. Many of these themes resulted from interviewee’s answers to questions that arose directly from studies conceptual framework. For example, one of the interview questions asked who is considered a hero to the union local, and who does the union local view as a villain? Other themes bubbled up from interview conversations. An instance of this was when a theme developed around the relationship between each union’s president and a specific member of their district school board executive team; the effect of individual person-to-person relationships was not anticipated in the original framework. The clusters of categories were then organized in alignment with the cultural elements identified in the conceptual framework: artifacts, values and assumptions. In addition, examples of differentiation, fragmentation, and integration were recognized within the values grouping. For each element grouping, I looked for examples that were visible and declared openly by the organization, such as publicly articulated organizational goals, and those ‘unwritten’ organizational elements such as expected dress, or style of jokes and jargon. This study identifies similar and dissimilar patterns and trends in organizational culture between the two unions.

Document analysis was undertaken in order to look for an alignment between the themes found in the interviews and union publications. In addition, data gathered from social media posts served to provide a third data point; although this data did not always relate directly to the topic of organizational culture, it did serve to reveal details of some of the interviewee’s personal opinions that may not have otherwise been evident through only an interview. Video, photographic evidence, and news stories posted on interview participant’s social media sites and union web sites were also considered as additional evidence of the assumptions and values held during the time of the study.
With a wide range of data and data types in hand, I began the task of sorting information themes into groupings. Distinct trends emerged in each of the case data sets. Cases were first analyzed separately, and then compared and contrasted with the other case study findings in order to arrive at conclusions.

The interview text included throughout this report is a verbatim account of each participants dialog. Infrequently, additional information had been added in order to clarify a quotation. Any supplementary text is shown in parenthesis in regular font type within the italicized interview quotes. Participants were given an opportunity to review the selected quotations including any clarification additions, prior to their publication in this document.

Terms used in this report include District 25, or District 25 OSSTF. This is the local union chapter that represents teachers who work in the Dawson Public District School Board (DPDSB). Dawson OECTA is the local union chapter that represents teachers who work in the Dawson Catholic District School Board (DCDSB). Each district school board is referred to specifically by their acronym, DPDSB or DCDSB, or as the board or the district when being discussed to in general terms. Dawson’s local secondary teachers’ unions are described as union locals or district union locals, or specifically by their name. The local and provincial bodies of the teachers’ union are distinguished by being referred to as the local union, when referring to the union being studied within the district, or the provincial union, when referring to the provincial executive body of that particular union grouping, either Catholic or Public. The provincial executive body is sometimes referred to as the federation by interviewees.

All of the names of staff members found within the study are pseudonyms. Alternate names have been used within the body of this report in order to protect the identity of interview participants. These same pseudonyms have been used in the report citations. Here, I have not identified the interview participant’s union position in order to further protect their anonymity.

Limitations of the study are found in two areas:

1. The discrepancy in the number of union executives interviewed: The District 25 OSSTF union chapter of The Dawson Public District School Board has four full time union positions whereas Dawson OECTA has one full time union executive. District 25 union executives hold the positions of president, first and second vice-president, and chief negotiating officer. Dawson OECTA’s full time union executive holds the position of
president. There are also differences in the number of secondary schools within each district. The Dawson Public District School Board has fifteen secondary schools, each with an in-school union representative, some of whom take on additional union committee responsibilities such as communications committee or social committee in addition to their in-school union work. The Dawson Catholic District School Board has seven secondary schools, each with an in-school union representative. Some of these in-school representatives also participate in union committee work in addition to their in-school responsibilities. In this study, five members of District 25 OSSTF were interviewed and three members of Dawson OECTA were interviewed. The difference in number of interview participants reflects the larger number of potential interviewees and full time union executives from District 25 schools, and the unusual single staffed union office of Dawson OECTA, along with the fewer number of secondary schools within the DCDSB.

2. My current position as a school administrator in one of the school boards being studied: During the time of the study, I was employed as a secondary school vice-principal within the DPDSB. I had been working in this school board for 5 years and was newly appointed at the school where one of the interview participants worked. I had worked with one other interview participant at a previous school. I had no direct working or personal relationship with any of the other interview participants. As a school administrator, I had no direct influence on the job placement, working conditions, or promotion opportunities for interview participants. I do believe that interview respondents were honest and candid in their responses; at no time did I feel that they held back information or censored their answer because of my position within the DPDSB organization.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in compliance with The University of Toronto’s Guidelines and Practices Manual for Research Involving Human Subjects. Subjects who participated in this study did so voluntarily. Every effort was made to protect the interview subjects right to privacy and confidentiality by using pseudonyms, and by ensuring that the published content of the interview does not include material that will reveal an interview participants identity. In addition, care was taken to disclose details around the purpose, scope and endpoint of the research material so that interview participants could take this into consideration prior to participating in
the study. No participants withdrew from the study. Subjects had an opportunity to review the transcribed content of their interview prior to its analysis and make any necessary corrections to the manuscript. Participants also had an opportunity to view the selected quotes that appear in this document along with any author’s additions that were included within the quote to clarify the quoted material. All interview data has been stored on the researchers privately owned password protected computer; all original audio data collected will be destroyed by March 1 2017. None of the participant identifying data has been stored with the interview data, and the researcher and her supervisor alone have viewed the data.
Chapter 4
OSSTF District 25 Case

The Union District

The Dawson Public District School Board (DPDSB) serves an amalgamated region of urban, suburban, and rural communities in the city of Dawson Ontario. On the first day at my new job as a secondary school administrator in DPDSB, I was met with an unusual opener from the school principal. Her message to me was ‘welcome, don’t get grieved!’ I must admit, I was not quite sure what she meant; although I knew that a grievance could arise when staff felt that they were being unfairly treated by an administrator, I had never in my fifteen year career as a teacher and school administrator at my previous job been involved in the grievance process. As my previous job was in a Catholic District School Board, this initial welcome sparked my curiosity about the differences in the organizational culture between unions that represented teachers within the Catholic and Public secondary school system. In retrospect, I recognize that this personal experience was the origin of this studies inception.

Union representatives from many positions within Dawson’s Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation district local have contributed to this case study. Having had an accumulated experience of close to fifty years in executive union positions, these members, some who have been released from their teaching jobs so they can dedicate all of their attention to union business, and some who continue to work as teachers in a secondary school setting, openly shared their memories, opinions and stories over the course of this study. Several themes emerged that connected to the framework that bounds this investigation of organizational culture. From those visible elements such as artifacts and publicly articulated values, through to those invisible elements such as deeply rooted assumptions that show themselves by an analysis of the alliances that had formed within the organization in an integrated, fragmented, or differentiated manner, the organizational culture was uncovered via the recounting of those experiences by interview participants, and through reading union publications.

This case is organized according to the divisions found in the conceptual framework. Interview and observational data that support the separate elements of Artifacts, Values, and Assumptions have been reported on. Within each of these divisions, I have identified whether the data was
visible - overtly stated - or invisible - based on my observations and resultant conclusions around the relationships between numbers of consistent statements provided by interviewees. For example, in the OSSTF case, many of the interviewees described situations where a lack of trust had caused poor relationships between union executives and the DPDSB school board executives resulting in a negative organizational culture. Only one union executive explicitly stated that a lack of trust between school board management and the union was at the root of ongoing labour disputes. The idea that DPDSB executives could not be trusted is an example of an invisible value that, although rarely explicitly stated, became evident when the interview text was analyzed.

Each broad section of Artifacts, Values, and Assumptions have been further described through the subheadings of Environment, Rituals, Heroes and Villains, and Communication Patterns. The topics were drawn from the interview questions, and some arose out of the interview transcript, or from observations noted by the primary investigator (PI). An example of this is the environment subheading: although there was not a specific interview question about the union’s office environment, observations were made by the PI and conclusions were drawn from these observations.

The subheading of Differentiation, Fragmentation and Integration is written as a separate subsection. Although linked to the Values section, the Differentiation, Fragmentation and Integration subheading is distinct from the organizational values subheading in that examples of Differentiation, where values differ causing subcultures to develop, Fragmentation, where fluid temporary alignments are made between the organizations members depending on the issue under discussion, or Integration, when values are resolutely communicated by the upper management, help explain how resolutely each union’s organizational values are held within the membership.

**Artifacts**

**Environment**
The first level of culture is easy to observe. Artifacts are “what you see, hear, and feel as you hang around” (Schein, 1999, p. 15). Some of the visible elements include the décor, ceremonies, rituals, and expected dress or appearance of the organization’s members. The invisible artifact
elements: the jokes, jargon, heroes, villains, and communication patterns, are disclosed as the contributors shared their experiences and stories.

The district union head office is located in a non-descript strip mall in an industrial Ontario city. On the exterior of the building a sign identifies the office as that of Dawson 25 OSSTF District headquarters. A Labour Council poster is displayed in the front window. The main office is furnished with utilitarian items; a large illustration of the OSSTF logo consisting of a lamp surrounded by an open-ended oval, is the only decorator item on display, covering a large wall in the main meeting room. There are few visible elements that give a visitor a sense of the organization’s past outside of the union logo.

Although the history of the organization is not expressed in a visual manner through displays or images in the decor, the past is shared among members through stories that help contribute to the organizational culture. Andrea explained:

> We tell stories about people or situations or strikes stories. Ted, he's our bookkeeper, he was a former president. On my gosh he must be pushing 70, and he tells us stories about (how) they were on strike in Dawson and they (the district school board) sent the sheriff door to door to get marks from teachers.

>(Andrea)

Other accounts reveal the strong sense of commitment to traditional symbols that is held by the membership. Mark recalls an incident when the provincial executive put forward a motion to make a minor change to the union logo and was met with strong unexpected opposition from the wider membership, and demonstrates the respect that is shown to those union members who uphold the union’s traditions:

> One guy gets up on a blue card, which means for us he speaking against, and says: You know what? It's not like I hate the thing or anything like that, but the blue swoosh around looks like a Conservative C to me. And I'm just saying, and you know, I know that probably wasn't the intention, but I would hope in the future we could consider stuff like
that. And it's not like he was furious or anything. He went and sat back down. The chair went back to the president and said: Would you like to close debate? Pass. They took the vote. All those in favor? Hands went up. All those against? It needed to pass by two thirds. It was almost two thirds against. And there is this silence of 600 people in the room. There was this holy shit! Did that just happen?

(Mark)

Although the office space lacks any display of a historical connection to the long-standing union presence in Dawson, there is an oral history that helps keep the memory of past labor struggles alive, and a sense among members at both the local and provincial level that historical icons such as the union logo are valued.

The office occupants are professionally dressed in business casual attire. The office administrator, who greets visitors, is pleasant and welcoming. The local president and chief negotiator work in private offices with their doors open next to each other. Although there are few visual clues to the work that is undertaken within this space, the disposition of the occupants is revealed when they begin to talk about their jobs. The interview participants shared how their organization’s culture is nurtured through strong organizational memory, which has been fostered through the sharing of stories of union action and activities at the local and provincial level. This organizational memory, which resulted from the personal relationships that existed between the union executive members and Dawson Public District School Board’s senior management, is particularly strong at the local union level. Union executives recall the past alliances of members who have moved from unionized teaching positions, to administrative positions within the district. Although these colleagues now hold differing positions of power within the district, the relationships are still evident. Mark explains:

We have a lot of this organizational memory stored up. And we know, oh, like a teacher will come into class and well, these three guys all taught in the same department together when I was at school, and one is the superintendent now and two of them are principals. And I used to go drinking with them every Friday night. So that exists. And to break that culture is difficult.

(Mark)
This organizational memory contributes to how the union interacts with the board. Andrea recalls her experience as a newly elected union executive looking to change what she sensed to be an adversarial relationship that existed between the union and the school board:

*When I took over in 2005 in my head I thought oh I don't understand the way the guys here work. I'm going to go in and build those relationships. I'm going to change this. I'm going to make it more collaborative. I'm going to work with the board, and it took me six months to figure out that that wasn't going to happen.*

**Interviewer** So can you speak a little bit about the things that were getting in the way?

**Andrea** Lack of respect for what we did. There was underlying sexism, as I'm the first woman to be a president for longer than a year. There was only one other woman. She lasted a year. A must win at all costs mentality. A we are going to tell you what to do, mentality. A we're not interested in your opinion mentality. Just win, win, win. And it absolutely impacts how you do...

**Interviewer** So they were a competitive. They were demonstrating that competitive mindset?

**Andrea** Yes and it's still there. And the faces have all changed. We have more organizational memory in this office than they do in human resources because I've been here for ten years. And it doesn't seem to matter. The faces change, the culture doesn't. And it's so frustrating.

(Andrea)

The organizational culture also contributes to the manner in which teachers who are new to the board perceive the union. Susan reflected on her experience as a new teacher; this experience helped her make the decision to become involved in union activities:

**Interviewer** When you were a new teacher how did you learn about the union?

**Susan** It was in the school. It was just part of the culture.
Interviewer So when you say it was part of the culture what kind of things showed themselves?

Susan I remember doing a coverage (taking the place of an absent teacher in a class), and I had the first half of coverage and I stayed to help a student because it was in geography, and a teacher came in and said, you need to leave now, and I said, no I'm just helping this kid, and she made me leave. She said, no you have to get out it's past your whatever minutes (the contractually agreed upon time). And that was right in the beginning, and I said wow!

(Susan)

All participants in the study agree that Dawson is a community of fighters, with strong ties to the labor movement and a history of standing up for workers’ rights, even if it means going against the direction of their Provincial affiliates.

I don't know this but I've heard from people on Council, that Dawson tends often to disagree with provincial (OSSTF), but we’re generally in the minority among the various districts. Many districts just go along with what provincial says, and Dawson often has a dissenting voice, which loses, but we are known to be dissenters.

Interviewer Do you think that is part of their culture? Do they hold that with pride?

Robert Yes, I think so. Like many of us when we feel we are in the right, and especially when we're in the minority, then we are also the victim. Yes I think that's part of the unofficial culture of Dawson, and that's fine. I don't mind being the underdog.

(Robert)

I’ve had my own run-ins with provincial people here. I stand my ground for my members. Like I'm as much a pain in the butt sometimes in the union as I am - within the (union) structure - as I am with the board for advocating for things. If I'm not happy with the way something goes, I will make change and I will move motions and I change things in the Federation just by putting motions on the floor. I'm not afraid to speak up.

(Andrea)
Although there are few physical environmental clues to the organizational culture of the Dawson OSSTF local office, a sense of strong traditional labor philosophy that values the unions’ stories and symbols of their struggle for job security and the maintenance of workers rights, emerges. They own their reputation as a strong labour unit who are willing to take on challenges both against the school board and sometimes against their own Provincial body with pride. Attempts to forage a new path to more progressive labour relations have not met with success, leading to ongoing poor relations with human resource executives at the Dawson Public District School Board. With conflicted relationships both at the local district level, and often with their provincial counterparts, they embrace the underdog persona. The themes of outspoken dissent and a staunch dedication to local traditions, continued to unfold throughout the study.

Rituals

Although interviewees would identify few typical ritualistic activities or symbols, save for the joint reading of the OSSTF oath, they did identify some ritualistic practices that contributed to setting the tone at meetings and events. The most formal ritual associated with union membership is the reading of the pledge at the start of each meeting which reads:

I solemnly dedicate myself to promote and advance the cause of education.
I will strive to achieve and maintain the highest degree of professional competence and will always uphold the honour, dignity, and ethical standards of my profession. I pledge my loyalty and support to the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation and will comply with the Constitution, Bylaws, policies and established practices that govern its members.

(OSSTF, 2015)

While there are few formal rituals that the group participates in, there is an aspect of their organizational practice that is somewhat ritualistic in that the activity takes place following strictly prescribed processes. Mark explains:

I would say the most ritualistic thing that we do is, and if I was going to identify ritual, maybe and this again is something I already talked about a bit, but in terms of parliamentary and rule stuff, our provincial meeting is incredibly efficient.

(Mark)
An adherence to these formal procedures has become a defining feature of the local unit. For example, Andrea commented:

_So our council is very well-run. So when you come here you see the Roberts rules in play. You learn them. The same with going to provincial, to our annual meeting. It is very well-run. And I know from around the province, the people, the provincial people, they change every year, they're assigned. They say that Dawson has a very well-run unit._

(_Andrea_) 

The ceremony of reciting the pledge, and ritualistic methodology for conducting meetings, form the official rites of union engagement. These rituals contribute to both the unification of the group, as evidenced by the group statements of purpose found at the start of each meeting, which are familiar to all and each member participates in. The other ritual of strict adherence to parliamentary process can cause a fragmented membership, as members must be familiar and acquainted with parliamentary rules of order if they wish to participate in meeting discussions. The theme of the adverse aspects of rigid formal processes showed itself throughout the study as it impacted on communications, and caused divisions within the union organization.

**Heroes and Villains**

By listening to the stories and recollections of union executives, the personal attributes of those who they held in high regard, and those who they feared or lacked respect for became evident. In District 25, villains as perceived by union members are found in board personnel, politicians and members of the public who threaten union purposes. Likewise, many of their heroes are those politicians and union members both historical and present day that uphold union ideals. Many of the positive and negative work experience stories that circulate throughout the membership, relay accounts of heroes and villains that have been identified through interactions between the union and board employees, or through individual personal relationships. Joseph explains how a superintendent of human resources, and a member of his staff were viewed as villains by union executives:

(_The union executive_) _actually referred to Alex (superintendent of human resources) once in a meeting as - they called him a villain. So Alex was a massive, massive target,
and the other target was Katrina (the manager of human resources), and they were venomous in their approach to those people.

(Joseph)

Heroes are found in union members who have made lifelong contributions to union activity, and in politicians or provincial personnel who are widely recognized as labor leaders:

Robert There are heroes among some of the executive and some of the diehard members the people who are really invested in it, for whatever reason. And they'll have their heroes. And then you meet the heroes and do you think really? Why?

Interviewer. So who are they? What kind of role or circumstance would make somebody a hero to them?

Robert They would've served for many years. That's really important. So longevity alone gives people awards. Brand recognition. So there are some names that people have met this person, and he or she has impressed them, and they feel well disposed towards them and so they say well that's a great person. But I've never really heard a lot about what makes them great or what they've done.

(Robert)

Negative stories where school and board administrators where characterized as villains, prompted some of the interviewees to become involved in union activities. These union representatives entered their positions prepared to do battle. In Dawson, relations with senior school board administrators within the human resources department have been largely adversarial over the years. The union executive and membership at large are on the lookout for contract breaches. This results in high numbers of grievances and arbitrations, which engages the union and management in ongoing conflict. Recently, relations between the union and the school board in Dawson were so conflicted that the union reported the district school board to the labor board:

Going to the labor board is probably the epitome, the worst thing that can happen between a union group and a board or an employer. It’s a big decision to make, but when
you have no choice, you have no choice. So I would say that's made board and union relationships worse. Not that it was great before. Right now unfortunately, the majority of things (grievances) are going through formal processes. We have, I have 16 in the next 10 months.

(Andrea)

These conflicts radiate throughout the system causing a deterioration in relationships at the school level when the grievance process times are extended due to the high numbers of complaints being filed, resulting in an ongoing climate of unrest:

And so if you end up getting five or six people at the school who are involved in a two-year grievance-arbitration process, then that's two years where you're going to have a bunch of people who aren't happy and that culture’s going to multiply.

(Mark)

Those members who are new to union activism feel the effects of this negative climate at union meetings. Susan recalls her experiences from union meetings:

At the meetings there is always a sense of anger. It's never a happy meeting. (Susan)

The cycle of grievance disputes, arbitrations and negative perceptions on both the side of the union and the board, permeates throughout the system. Union executives begin to think that filing and disputing grievances against unscrupulous board executives and school administrators is their primary work. Robert reflects on his concerns around the grievance process and the vilification of school administrators:

I know, when I was on executive, the chief negotiator and grievance officer, I don't know if he was happy about it, but he seemed at least to be very clear at every meeting that a lot of grievances were going ahead, you know, more than the previous year, and that means we're doing our job, and it means that the admin are in the wrong. I don't know if that's just self-serving, to say we need to make a lot of grievances because there are a lot of grievances? It seems to be a conflict of interest in my mind. I would think if leadership
is working well, there shouldn't be a lot of need for grievances. There should be a better rapport at the higher levels.

(Robert)

As union and board relationships deteriorate, there is a strict adherence to process and procedure on both sides, which causes an increase in grievances, as neither side trusts the other enough to engage in discussion or mediation as a problem solving strategy. The local union executives become further empowered as the provincial body of the union sanctions their actions; this in turn raises the hero status of the union local:

We lead in arbitrations in Dawson. And remember that we don't file them frivolously. We have processes. We file the grievance, it moves to step one and two for resolution. It doesn't get resolved. We file to arbitration. There is a body at provincial office. They are responsible for two things: the purse strings and to judge the merit of the grievance. Ninety-eight percent of ours go through.

(Andrea)

It costs ten-thousand dollars a day to go to arbitration...It's absolutely a huge waste and I'm sad to say that largely right now it (problem resolution) is formal. My preference is that it is informal, but I can't get responses (from board personnel). I have very specific timelines in the collective agreement to file, so if I can't get a response or a resolution, we just have to move it on, because if we do go to arbitration, the board can file a preliminary objection that we haven't met the timeline.

(Andrea)

School board executives, especially those in the human resources department, and some site based school administrators become the target villains of union action. The union local’s provincial partners validate the union local claims of unfair labor practices as they support Dawson 25 in filing and following through with grievances and arbitrations in order to settle disputes. The ongoing series of conflicts contributes to negative relationships between the union and the district school board.
Communication Patterns

Discussions around communication methods both within the union executive and with the wider union membership reveal some key elements of union processes that help an outsider understand how organizational communication contributes to the overall culture. Data from discussions with interview participants around questions relating to communication methods, member training, and story telling, helped form a view to the communication patterns within District 25.

Interview contributors offered a picture of union activity as one of efficient utilization of process and strict observance of guidelines for member participation at meetings. Although formal in nature, the union executives said that union members valued this approach because, as educators, the members were comfortable with well-organized operations and clearly communicated rules and processes. Another theme that emerged throughout the interviews was the value of personal relationships at the school level, and the importance of face-to-face communication methods. All participants touched on the significance of personal relationships in order to influence member opinion. Both formal communication methods that include membership training and in-services, and less formal methods such as the sharing of stories through informal conversation, helped those new to the union local learn about their union’s culture. In addition, as new union executive members are trained, they acquire an understanding of working norms during educational sessions where stories of past events are communicated, in order to alert trainees to possible contractual violations by school administrators. These formal and informal story telling methods help to spread the union culture to both new members and newly elected union representatives.

Formal communication processes are routinely used in meetings both at the local level and at the provincial level. There was consensus among interviewees that the union prides itself on operating within a prescribed framework grounded in a publicly articulated process.

*Interviewer* So that structure, that organization you feel is a positive?

*Mark* And it could be the fact that we are a lot of education workers in a room and we don’t want to see it devolve. We like the idea of structure, and we like the idea of order.

Andrea is very proud of the unit’s reputation for efficiency of operation.
There is a very strict processes for our meetings. It is extremely well run. Everything has to be submitted by this date and if it isn’t, then it’s out of order.

(Andrea)

The union executives expressed a level of comfort in their ability to represent their membership while following their fundamental principles of due process.

So the idea of respecting people’s opinions, but ultimately the idea that democracy is going to have to take us forward, and that there’s a reason we have procedures and rules, and there’s a reason why people are given authority to do certain things.

(Mark)

These strict procedural communication methods are not taught in any formal manner. Andrea relates how she learned about the working norms of the group:

**Interviewer** So think back to when you first became, - when you were first invited to be involved in the union and you first came into your first meeting. How did you learn about what the processes and the working norms were?

**Andrea** Osmosis - a lot of it.

**Interviewer** Can you talk a little bit about that?

**Andrea** There’s two pieces to your job. There’s the technical part and then there’s the political. And the political, you have to learn through osmosis for the most part. You just learn. Like I wasn’t very politically savvy when I started but I’ve come a long way.

(Andrea)

Nonetheless, there was also concern expressed that there is a negative side to these formalized structures. Robert talks about his initial feeling of discomfort when he first attended a highly controlled monthly union meeting where he witnessed a member of the executive, who was well versed in operating procedures, undermine a dissenting voice.
Sometimes it seemed to me he (the vice-president of the union) used it (parliamentary language and procedure) to their advantage if they really wanted to push something through sneakily. He might disagree, but that’s okay. But I can understand. They’re trying to get the job done and expedite matters. But people who don’t know what’s going on, will occasionally speak up, and people are sort of awkward about it.

(Robert)

An event that caused communications to be completely shut down when the opinion of a small group of allies within the organization was at odds with those of higher ranking union executives was also troubling. Robert relays a story that demonstrates the union’s reaction to a union committee publication when they published an article that expressed views did not align with those of the union executive.

I knew some colleagues who were involved with OSSTF, and they invited me to join – I forget what it’s called now – oh yes, the Political Action Committee was the first one. I joined them, and they wanted to talk about meaningful issues, and they had a publication called the Action Report, and so I thought, okay, this could be meaningful and give the classroom teacher something to work with. It was funny because, I think it was the first year I was involved, a teacher submitted an article about Remembrance Day, criticizing the typical approach that said Hooray Canada and the U.S., we won the war! - the second world war –ignoring Russia’s input. And so this teacher had written an essay in the Action Report saying we need to be more accurate in our history and show what sacrifices the Russians made, and how significant their contribution was. Far more significant, he argued, than the Western allies. And it enraged members, and that came back to the Action Report, and the Action Report shut down as a result. This was an educational piece that was well researched and documented, and it was provocative, granted, and so that just struck me how bizarrely conservative and defensive they (the union executive) were.

(Robert)
The suppressing of opinions that challenged the opinion of the local union executives caused a group of committee members to abandon their union affiliation. Robert also noted that fragmentation of the membership was caused by the use of strict procedural language; a possible solution to this may be training for members, but that this training was not offered.

*But some training in that (parliamentary language) would be helpful. And to do it in an upfront, encouraging way, as opposed to, we will teach with a few of the tricks, but we will reserve the trump cards.*

*(Robert)*

Yet overall, the positive benefits of adherence to a clear set of operating procedures was evident to most union leaders. They said that clarity of process gave members a common understanding of their purpose, and course of action when there were disagreements with management.

*I would say this, I would say that the one thing that I really walked away from was that the union doesn’t defend teachers, they defend process and that’s the thing that I really felt that I learned from that; that it’s not about individual teachers or something they’ve done that was questionable or beyond questionable. They defended process not an individual or an individual’s actions. And that would probably be the big thing. And that was consistent. And that was something that exec (at the union local office) was really consistent in. So that was probably the number one thing that jumped out at me in terms of a core belief that was incredibly consistent.*

*(Joseph)*

But while structure and order rule communications at meetings both at the local and provincial level, the union executive surprisingly favors informal methods of communication when managing membership issues. A desire to foster the development of trusting personal relationships through face-to-face meetings and the sharing of all available information through email, phone conversations, and social media is evident.

*Number one way they (the membership) want to be talked to is face-to-face. No surprise. No surprise. They also like email but they want to be able to call people. I’ve been told never ever get an automated phone system in here. I will have an employee as long as we*
can afford it. For a human to actually answer the phone.

(Andrea)

Interview participants clearly communicated the power of face-to-face discussion and dialogue. They described a number of regular activities that the executive and the branch president engage in that support this model of communication. The executive regularly meets with individual school groups on site in schools in either lunchtime meetings, after school in-services or while representing individual teachers in meetings with school administrators.

The executive would make a point of visiting all the branches. They would come in for lunch and answer questions and I always thought they did a very good job. (Joseph)

The role of the school branch president and the relationship that the staff has with this member is also an important element in the communication chain.

You get a certain amount of leaders that come to our mass meetings, and the next day they go back to their school and a lot of people come up to them and say, so what should I do? And that can oftentimes swing the entire school right? Just based on one person’s perspective.

(Mark)

The power of stories, and the manner in which stories are shared among members also influences the membership’s understanding of union culture. There are a number of situations where stories are shared, thereby spreading cultural traditions. The first is through training sessions that utilize case studies of current situations in order to help new executives understand the tasks related to their job. Although union executives are careful to respect confidentiality during these training sessions, the case study stories of administrator and senior board official’s indiscretions help contribute to the perceptions of the union trainee participants.

For the past eight years I’ve been giving the pregnancy parental leave workshop at the
OSSTF office. In my role as benefits officer, that’s one of the things I would do. So I would give case study scenarios at the end of each one.

(Mark)

Furthermore, stories are shared at monthly executive meetings with branch executives when grievance reports are presented.

And oftentimes in a meeting you’ll relate the disbelief stories. Those are the ones that have, like, or you’ll have somebody from a school put up their hand and say so this is what happened at my school this week. And everyone goes oh my God seriously? It’s those disbelief stories and people try to outdo each other.

(Mark)

This type of story telling can contribute to the spreading of commonly held notions among the group.

The treasurer would speak and it was you know, just relaying information about the budget. Francis would speak, generally angry.

Interviewer What do you mean angry?

Susan Well not really angry. Just that tone, the tone is really just anti-management. Just examples of certain schools, what certain principals are doing. No names are mentioned but it’s common knowledge because that rep from that school would be like – you know who they are talking about.

(Susan)

Branch concerns tell us what’s going on. And then whether it’s CBC (collective bargaining), or grievance, or whether it’s a branch president who throws up their hand to say we have a situation (at a school) where this has happened...and that was really
interesting because you would hear stories about administrators doing things that you would think well why would they do that?

(Joseph)

Stories are also shared by members within individual schools, establishing local cultures based on the perspective expressed by the storyteller.

*I think a lot of those (stories) are shared internally. I think a lot of those are shared at the job site. You will have the friends that you make at the job site who will tell you the stories. It’s not done by the union.*

(Mark)

Mark explains how the union culture is passed to schools largely through the lens of the branch president. The branch president’s reputation in the school community can contribute to the staff’s perception of their union.

*So culture wise, ultimately I think within a certain school, you end up having a staff that whenever the staff rep who is a branch president may be really well-liked, or maybe is not well-liked. Maybe nobody else wants to do it. Maybe there’s a principal at that school but nobody wants to get on the bad side of. There are so many different little individual things. So if you have a principal who is very authoritarian and nobody wants to battle against that principal then all of a sudden the people who might consider being the branch president there, won’t do it. So then it’s left to one or two people who maybe you wouldn’t choose first, but one of them is willing to do it. That can shape how that entire school perceives the union because they become the conduit.*

(Mark)

Communication methods have changed over the years and now the union relies heavily on email to distribute information to their membership. One drawback to this method of communication is
information overload; the union executive can never be sure if or how their membership uses this information in order to make decisions.

Most of our members, we have personal emails for. And we send out everything. So they’re going to hear it. Whether they read it or not, that’s a different issue.

(Mark)

In an effort to ensure transparency, the union shares as much information as they have available. With so much information to absorb, a sense of unease is created, even for the branch representatives.

You pick up all the handouts, which were like a ridiculous amount of, tons of information.

(Susan)

The increasing use of social media contributes to the mass of information to interpret and also to the spread of misinformation.

Now everyone is all over social media talking about this and this and this. Sometimes it’s misinformation.

(Mark)

But the union holds to its processes in order to ensure that their members have access to all of the information that is available. Material is delivered electronically through email and social media, and also through handouts and at information meetings. Decisions are made by membership vote. These events follow well-established procedures. Some union executives view the increasing influence of social media as a positive way of reaching their membership, and others view it as an annoyance.

I would say the number one (communication method) is email, but on the really big issues, we do school visits. So we go in groups of two. And we go school to school. We will be doing that soon because we’ve got local bargaining and they prefer that. I also use Facebook and Twitter, which is new. Members will reach out to me through Facebook and Twitter.
(Andrea)

Although, even though social media may contribute to the sharing of opinions and information, when it comes time to vote at an election or on an important resolution a face-to-face meeting is held.

You can’t change the way you do your core business. It may become more irritating to have to do your core business. For instance, we’re still going to have your tentative agreement. We are still going to have an information meeting. We are still going to have a vote in the schools. We are still going to pass it, or not pass it. Along the way they there is this buzzing fly going around your head. And that is social media.

(Mark)

The organizational communication methods, made up of strictly defined processes and adherence to procedure, becomes operationalized in the day-to-day work of the elected union members. These operations are subtly influenced by the personalities of the union executives, who are publicly bound by union objectives but may privately hold to a different set of beliefs resulting in fragmentation, as alliances are made based on individual perspectives. Communications are also influenced by messages received by the membership through the lens of the in-school representative, who is charged with gathering information from meetings and curating it for delivery at the school level, making the role of the in-school representative a powerful position. The stories that these members choose to share become some of the most influential factors in the maintenance of the culture at OSSTF Dawson.

Values

Organizational Goals

According to Schein, “the essence of culture is these jointly learned values, beliefs, and assumptions that become shared and taken for granted as the organization continues to be successful” (Schein, 1999, p. 20).

OSSTF as an organization are “committed to protecting and enhancing public education” (OSSTF, 2015). In doing so, its work is directed toward supporting five principles:
• Equal access to a comprehensive and well-rounded education
• Class sizes that provide opportunities for individual attention
• Access to adequate resources and programs provided by internal, qualified professionals
• A safe and positive learning environment that is well-maintained
• Meaningful consultation and shared decision-making

(OSSTF, 2015)

As interviewees related their experiences, it was evident that those with like-minded perspectives had aligned within the union organization. Although when describing the union’s values in broad strokes most agreed on the foundational truths that underpin their work such as member protection, working toward collective interests, and improving working conditions, a deeper investigation provides some insight into a fragmentation among the executives with respect to their views.

On a superficial level, all contributors revealed their support of union ideology, and identified common union goals when asked about the basic taken-for-granted assumptions upon which the organization was founded. But, probing questions around these values revealed a number of fragmented themes. These included concern around the union’s narrow agenda of teacher working conditions and benefits, the union’s inappropriate spending habits, the union’s suppression of non-conforming ideas, and a fear that the unions inner conflicts had caused teachers to disengage from union participation.

As interview participants responded to the question: ‘what are the basic taken-for-granted assumptions your organization is founded on’, their core values were revealed. Susan said the basic taken-for-granted assumption that underpinned union work was:

\[ \text{To protect employees. To provide optimal working conditions. Solidarity and supporting each other.} \]

(Susan)

Mark held a similar view:
Member protection is what everything else that the union does is based on. And that's not just member protection after something has happened but member protection in advance of something happening. So the entire concept of collective bargaining is that we protect our members from having to either go through with somebody's already gone through, by putting language in a contract, or we try to presume that this could be a problem down the line and we want to protect our members from that happening.

(Mark)

Whereas Robert identified the collective power of the labour movement as a foundational value:

So the labor movement, and the virtues of the labor movement, that's the fundamental one.

(Robert)

And Joseph touched upon the systematic process driven approach to problem resolution:

The union doesn't defend teachers, they defend process.

(Joseph)

And Mark identified the democratic aspect of union engagement:

The core value of any union should be the members are in charge. The members at large are in charge.

(Mark)

All interviewees confirmed their dedication to the espoused goals stated in their unions publicly articulated principles, and reiterated in their motto. The motto reinforces the themes of solidarity and support that membership is founded upon.

Our motto, which I stand by is: let us not take thought for our separate interests, but let us help one another. So the challenge is to be able to work collectively. Diversity, equity,
inclusivity, I often find myself - sometimes I have to tell members that an issue is not about their individual rights, that we're doing this because it's for the collective. That's hard sometimes for an individual member to accept.

(Andrea)

Although each interviewee expressed their firm commitment to traditional foundational union values, their opinions became fragmented when they discussed the manner in which the goals were to be achieved. Some members were openly critical of how the union operationalized these values while conducting their work; they were uncomfortable with the confrontational stance that is assumed by the union when interacting with school and district school board administrators.

There is this default desire to blame admin for whatever doesn’t suit us. And I think that’s unfair.

(Robert)

There is a kind of a commonly held line in the labor movement, that all problems are management.

(Andrea)

Not only were they uncomfortable with the union’s characterization of school and board administrators, they were also critical of some of the standard operating procedures that the union engaged in which appeared to be at odds with union goals of equity and inclusivity. Their criticism of spending union funds on social activities that only benefitted a few union involved members is one example of such critique.

When I first started going to the council meetings, and I saw how much money was spent and it was just such a waste, like the food and the pop, and the drinks. And going out for dinner, and you can order whatever you want. That’s other member’s money you know?

(Susan)

Once a year members meet for their annual general meeting. This meeting stands out as an anomaly in that the typical highly structured format of union meetings is abandoned, as members
gather together to socialize while they conduct annual elections and other union business. One interviewee was critical of this process; he observed that many of the members in attendance were more focused on the socialization aspect of the event, rather than the important decision making process that was taking place at the meeting. Joseph recounts his experience:

*I went to the AGM (Annual General Meeting) and I was there to vote for somebody and it was the first time I had ever been. And I was amazed because, someone turned to me and said, you know we could be voting to bring National Socialism back. So they had all these motions that they were putting forth and no one was paying attention, and you know people are talking; people were drinking and voting.*

*(Joseph)*

One interview participant took exception to the narrow focus of member working conditions and benefits that seemed to dominate the agenda at most union meetings.

*Very many teachers, it seems to me when it comes to union work, they're interested in their benefits, and their pay, and their vacation, and how to maximize those, and that's what really excites them. And to me that's the least exciting part of the job. I mean, I'm very lucky and I'm grateful that I get paid what I do. I think it's fair, and the benefits that I have. But that's not why I became a teacher, and I don't know, maybe I'm just an outlier, but a lot of teachers seem very interested in that, and when those items are up for discussion, that's when they get involved.*

*(Robert)*

Those interviewed expressed a variety of thoughts that demonstrated a disconnect between their personal understanding of union activities and the organizational opinion promoted by their union. One member mentioned a general fear among the membership of speaking up when they disagree with a union direction. But although they acknowledged this fear, surprisingly they still upheld the premise that as long as ideas were presented and agreed upon in a formalized setting following agreed upon rules, the decisions were legitimate.

*So there's a real fear about people misspeaking or being taken to represent the (teachers’ union) Federation. Again it just seems really paralyzing to me and a bit paranoid. Why*
not be a bit more honest about the mishmash of people that we have, and the different ideas they hold? And let that be the fact, but that's just me.

(Robert)

I may disagree with a lot of decisions that organizations or people make, but I rarely begrudge them when they are done according to their own rules.

(Mark)

Fear was expressed that as union values become more and more fragmented, many teachers respond by distancing themselves from union engagement.

_A lot of teachers just don't want to get involved in the union. They say, 'I just want to do my job'._

Interviewer _Why do you think that is?_

Susan _They can't be bothered._

(Susan)

But Mark had insight into the sometimes indifferent relationship that teachers have with their unions.

_I mean a lot of the joy that teachers take away from their profession they don't necessarily associate with the union. They associate with the profession. They have their passion for being a teacher. They’re passionate about education and that's fantastic. I get that. A lot of them don't make the link between the fact that they're able to do what they do because of the fact that they've got a collective agreement which means they don't have to do three and a half or four classes a day. They get prep time. They get a salary, which allows them to support their family. They get health and safety and all of that stuff. That's extra stuff that is not in the forefront of their minds. Their job satisfaction doesn't come from the fact that all of that exists. It comes from their teachable moments. Which is_
probably as it should. That's fine as a primary motivator. That's okay. But a lot of people aren't willing to think of that secondary motivator as well. And so we are often called upon when we needed. Which isn't any different from any other union. (Mark)

Throughout the interviews, union members shared an informal critique of some union activities, demonstrating a level of freedom within the group to hold on to their personal opinions. Interviewees were not fearful of repercussion in sharing their thoughts: they stated that they openly expressed their views in a sometimes-challenging manner within their ranks. So while on the surface the union executives appeared to be united in their effort to the actualize union organizational goals, it was apparent that subgroups and alliances of like views had formed creating fragmentation within the organization.

The espoused publicly articulated goals of the union were expressed by each interviewee and identified as evident to some degree in their work within the union. What became obvious throughout the interviews was a distinct division of thought when participants were prodded to examine how their personal values aligned with organizational goals. This deep reflection often took place when interviewees were asked to discuss how union goals and objective were met, resulting in what might have been a realization on their part that their organization may not be as focused on achieving the broader overall goals of union engagement as they thought.

Operating Procedures

Operating procedures are those step-by-step processes that workers engage in to complete routine tasks. The values that an organization holds, will influence how these processes emerge. One such example of a union task whose operationalization has been impacted by District 25 values, is the job of member protection. The union’s value of holding firm to their belief that all worker complaints had a right to due process, revealed interesting insights into how union work had evolved within the local office. What became evident, was an overwhelming emphasis on launching and battling union member grievances. These grievance disputes dominated the union’s work, causing some of the interview participants to express concern that there was little effort to work towards broader public education union goals. There was also a concern that the cost of such conflicts was a poor use of public funds. Once again, a rift appeared between some members’ desire to work towards publicly espoused union values for all public education concerns, and District 25’s very narrow focus on member protection that tended to dominate the
union’s work.

The oath that everyone stands for, the secretary reads at every meeting of council. And it's about us not looking to our own benefit, but to support one another, and the aims of education. But again, once that's been said, there's not a lot about education. Honestly. It's about business and what complaints are being dealt with, but not a lot about encouraging greater dialogue, openness, that sort of thing. It just seems to me, actually, when I presented my complaint to council on that one occasion, I prefaced it by saying; we have all stood up for this oath. So what I've experienced is the opposite of what supports a collaborative model for being concerned with education matters.

(Robert)

Both Susan and Joseph expressed concern about the format of monthly meetings, that concentrated more on ensuring adherence to contracts and the sharing negative stories than about educational topics:

In the meetings we never talk about education. If we're here for a PD day it's always about the number of minutes that we can be in the PD day, and they'll talk about the schools that go over the (contractual) minutes, and this principal is making staff do this PD, which is not about education right? It's all about protecting teachers, but there's no education agenda. Like, new curriculum came out and it is great you have PD, but it's tied to no more than 225 minutes. It's about rules. The rules of the contract.

(Susan)

The union is incredibly knowledgeable about issues with arbitration, but as far as education stuff they seem to be a step behind and I always wondered about this.

(Joseph)

Yet the union demonstrated that the district school board’s confrontational labour relation stance was at the root of their preoccupation with the grievance and arbitration process. Mark explains:

But you'll have a grievance, with a solution value of five hundred dollars. Every day of arbitration costs the board fifteen thousand dollars. And if you're going to do it without
prejudice or precedent anyways, really you can't find something to solve on this? And I don't know where the pressure points are behind those decisions that caused them to happen. But in some cases they are... Like we've come to mediated settlements for like twelve hundred bucks. And we've come to that on arbitration day. That's costing the board fifteen thousand bucks.

(Mark)

Understanding both the group’s shared values, and the alliances of those with like values within the union, provides insight into some of the cultural divides that exist within the union organization. In addition, absences of solid connections to those principles that are articulated by their provincial affiliate further isolates the local from the wider union community. In District 25, a fragmentation of purpose was evident in that some interviewees expressed that their predominant concern was protection for members, while others indicated that they were more focused on issues impacting education, and yet another group most valued consistency of process and procedure.

Differentiation, Fragmentation and Integration

Although organizational culture is initially founded on the objectives of the organizational founders (Schein, 1999), as institutions mature and grow, this top down integration of thought may become fragmented. When those with like-minded opinions align with each other, or as subgroups arise based on shared values, gender, ethnicity or job type (Martin, 2004; Trice, 2011), examples of organizational differentiation, fragmentation, and integration occur. Within District 25, all three organizational processes are evident. Integration of thought is largely disseminated through formalized training sessions delivered either at the local or provincial level.

_They do in-services so I had a health and safety in-service. I had a grievance in-service. I did a management in-service, and I've got to say they were outstanding._

(Joseph)

But local conflicts and alignments result in differentiation within the ranks based on competing values, or support for those in like positions. Joseph relates an example of an internal union
conflict that resulted in a fractured internal structure.

*I would say* (the working relationship) *it was poisonous during the time I was up there and it got worse and worse because of the political backroom maneuverings* (between union executives).

*(Joseph)*

He also shares a situation that he had witnessed that differentiated younger members from those more senior to them.

*New teachers don't see the benefit of the union. They get bumped down the seniority list – the first off. They see teachers who don't coach, who don't do all these things, being defended. They don't understand that they (the union) are defending a process, not the individual teacher.*

*(Joseph)*

Joseph shared his concern that union executives align and realign in a fluid fragmented manner in order to remain in control within their current position. He recalled an election when the union president feared that a popular teacher, who was not a current candidate for election, would be nominated for union president from ‘the floor’ at the annual election meeting.

*I received two phone calls to find out if someone was running off the floor against them.*

*(A union executive asked)* *can you find out if so-and-so is running off the floor?*

And as union officials remained in position year over year, Joseph felt that some union executives lost sight of their original purposes.

*Like any political entity where you’re elected, there comes a point where it becomes less about what you’re doing and more about being re-elected and keeping yourself in power.*

*(Joseph)*

While Robert fears that in order to move up within the union, it is necessary to mask your nonconforming opinions.
It seems to me that among administration and the school board, and in the union, it's a lot about compliance with something that's come from the top and not rocking the boat. Not even questioning. Questioning is perceived as insubordination. Again this strikes me as bizarre, and I think it's because I think as people rise in these organizations, generally it's those who are not strong individuals. They are looking to fit. They might have a secret individual identity, but in order to climb, they have to comply. And I think that just really made the environment toxic.

(Robert)

Susan worries that the union’s political maneuvering and infighting contributed to a lack of engagement in union activities by members at large.

I’ve talked to staff and they are like I don’t care, I just want to come to do my job. So there is a disconnect there. There is a disconnect of knowledge, and the union promoting themselves in their own way.

(Susan)

Yet Mark takes the long view of the organization’s operations while reinforcing his opinion that adherence to process ensures that ultimately, the determination of the collective will be fairly represented.

So there's an element of respectful democracy. Basically the idea that you're going to get a chance to argue your point. You're going to get a chance to put forward your ideas, people will be heard, people have their questions answered, all of that stuff. But in the end the collective is going to have to make a decision.

(Mark)

And Andrea sees varying organizational alignments as part and parcel of a job where sometimes people may disagree with each other but in the end they work toward a common purpose.

It's no different than teaching. So if an outsider came into a staff room and listened to teachers talk about kids, they would be horrified. But if they went to a formal board meeting or a formal committee meeting and hear teachers talk about kids it would be
very different. Because, and I don't think it's because teachers are horrible people or are not compassionate, but here – there is gonna be a lot of swearing in this office.

(Andrea)

So while the nature of the relationships within the union organization are sometimes fragmented, causing members to create alliances based on their personal beliefs and values, the organization as a whole is integrated in those broader organizational goals of fair workplace treatment and a teacher’s right to representation. These values are operationalized during organized training sessions, through the sharing of stories, and by participation in union activities, including monthly meetings and committee work. Strong organizational processes and publicly articulated structures that are laid out in union operation manuals, member handbooks, and standard operating procedures, ensure that all members have an opportunity to become familiar with the guidelines that they are to function within. In addition, the union’s communication methods guarantee that members have access to as much information as they choose, along with the ability to select the method that they wish to receive it in, including reading email correspondence, attending meetings, calling the union office directly, making contact through in-school representatives or becoming participants in the many opportunities that present themselves through committee work.

Within District 25, examples could be seen of fragmentation, where fluid internal alliances were formed based on each union executive’s perspective. Differentiation was also evident as there appeared to be two distinct subcultures: one of a group of longer standing union representatives, and one made up of newer members of the union team. Yet there was also integration of thought when it came to identifying broad union goals and objectives. But although the solid structures and processes contributed to a sense of stability and unity, trends emerged that provided evidences to the underlying assumptions that significantly influenced District 25’s organizational culture.

Assumptions

It’s quite possible to simply gather information that confirms our pre-existing assumptions - -
Indeed it’s common. We “download our mental models”, and see what we’re prepared to see. In a sense, what we’re seeing is our past, in the form of our mental models reflecting past experience.

(Senge, 2004 p. 88)

Assumptions are those deeply rooted taken for granted truths and our personal view of human nature, that can be difficult to uncover. For each of the interview participants, a glimpse of their personal mental model was apparent when they answered the question: what is the right way for people to relate?

Collectively and collaboratively would be my two ways of working with people. That said, there are times when you're not necessarily working collaboratively or collectively. You’re sitting on the other side of the bargaining table. I'm working collectively for my members, but I'm not necessarily working collectively with the board, at the same time. (Andrea)

I completely believe in a bottom-up approach. I believe in raising things up from the base, and starting to get things better, as opposed to trying to tweak things from the top. (Mark)

I would say the best way to interact with people is individually. Every person and situation is different and I think you fall back on those relationships you have built and value to really dictate how you interact with people. (Joseph)

My attitude is we are much better together when we are individuals. Carl Jung said two zeros don't make anything, you have to be a full fledged individual before you can interact with another individual, to then collaborate meaningfully. Otherwise we end up with a herd of followers. (Robert)

One brain isn't enough. The more brains the better. But it depends on the situation you know, sometimes too many hands in the pot.
As each individual self-identified their personal preference for the manner in which they related to each other, and to members of their union, it became apparent that these views had contributed to the development of their union’s organizational culture. Within the group of interview participants, there were distinct alliances: those who thought that the best type of interaction was person to person as individuals, those who thought that the voice of the group should direct the union executive’s actions, and those who believed in collaborative methods of interaction.

Further insight into the interviewee’s mental models came from sources outside of the interview. Some of the union executives openly shared thoughts on social media sites, thereby revealing aspects of their personal opinions. During the course of this study, interview participant posts help uncover some of their deeply held values.

I’m tired of hearing from management that teachers are resistant to change. No. We just disagree with your bad ideas.

(Andrea, Twitter, May 2015)

Election Day is almost here. Ready to vote on Good Jobs, Retirement Security, Health Care & Childcare.

(Mark, Twitter, October 2015)

These personally held assumptions became a factor in the manner in which each individual navigated their union work. Work issues arose most commonly from two connected factors that impacted Dawson 25’s organizational culture: trust and relationships.

Human Relations

The union executive in Dawson finds itself in an uncomfortable position due to a lack of trust on many levels, and a yearning for the stability that comes from having trusting relationships. Throughout the discussion with participants, the interconnected themes of trust and relationship emerged in parallel fashion. For example, one contributor spoke of the benefits of developing
good working relationships with members of the school board with whom he often found himself engaged, but at the same time often being embroiled in battles that seem to have been hijacked by a board executive’s personal agenda. Mark explains the challenge of being adversarial without being combative:

*There is a - there's a fine line that starts to exist between being adversarial and being antagonistic. I feel as a union, it's our role to be adversarial in many cases. And adversarial doesn’t mean that we have to be at each other's throats. But it means that we’re sitting on opposite sides of a lot of issues. In many cases, that's crossed the line over into antagonistic. Especially when you don't see the logic in something, or you feel like you're being jerked around, or you feel like this is happening, or this is happening, or this is happening. So that's part of the issue. And in this board, it's been an entrenched culture like this for a lot of years.*

*(Mark)*

There was a strong theme of mistrust of board processes and some board executives’ personal motivational factors.

*It seems like there is a certain element of clubbism that happens with hires. In other words, this superintendent gets hired, and this superintendent has all of these principals who he was friends with, that become part of this superintendent’s club. And they will have each other’s back until whatever happens. And then new people get brought in to the club. So maybe this person gets moved up, and this person becomes a vice-principal. And you have all of these little clubs that exist, of people who have each other’s back. And depending who gets into positions of power that starts to propagate. I think anybody who's been with this board long enough knows what I'm talking about and know the people that I'm talking about. And you can definitely at least say this person is attached to this person is attached to this person. And you would never expect this person to go against this person, or this superintendent to go against this principal.*

*(Mark)*

A further theme that arose was that of mistrust of district school board executive members due to
sexism, and a reliance on relations that are designed to exclude those who may not be comfortable in engaging in unconventional processes, such as resolving a grievance over a beer at a bar. As one interviewee commented:

Something that's always bothered me about our board, it's a huge old boys club. I don't need to tell you that. I find as a woman, I don't go out drinking at the bar with the boys, and so that will disadvantage me sometimes in a political, where I've had to say to my boys - at least I'm the president - boys, you're going to go to the bar with the board’s boys and you're going to solve these grievances. Because I'm not getting anywhere. Because we're doing this (show of hands butting up against each other) so sometimes you have to use those relationships. It's very bizarre and I don't like doing it that way but ultimately, it is the outcome I want. I want them (grievances) resolved. I don't want to take it to arbitration if I don't have to. I want them resolved. So if we can do it that way, I will take any route I can.

(Andrea)

A lack of trust between the union and school board executives was not the only trust issue evident. Interview participants expressed a lack of trust between the union executives and the general union membership, among the union executives themselves, and even between the union local and the provincial union organization. The union executive responds to their memberships lack of trust by ensuring transparency of process.

There’s minutes. We don’t hide. Nothing is hidden. It’s very transparent. They (the members) know exactly where the money went. They know exactly how it got from A to B. There's minutes kept. Everything is - it has to be. I would have my butt burned if I didn't.

Branch presidents will hold your feet to the fire.

(Andrea)

Yet, the membership continues to openly questions their local union leaders’ decisions:

The most radical thing that we've done in the past several years, is get a fourth person into the district office. And that has been a fight. Because everyone wants to know, how is
this happening? Are we getting screwed? Is someone getting something out of this? We are really adding a fourth person because we want to increase our member protection, but the amount of debate that it engendered was staggering.

(Mark)

And even within the District 25 itself, the executive members are cautious in their communications. Robert identified his cautious approach to union communications:

(There is) an implicit fear of saying anything on record that could be misconstrued, or could be used against the union.

(Robert)

District 25 and the district school board’s lack of trust, sometimes displays itself in foolish behaviors on the part of both parties, which Robert finds simplistic:

If you're having a meeting (with school board executives) and they’ve got three representatives, you’ll want to have at least three or four, and so to me it's just that chimp-like behavior.

(Robert)

A lack of trust is also evident between District 25 and OSSTF provincial. Andrea elaborated on the district local’s relationship with their provincial partner:

There was a mistrust between the locals and the provincial at that time. There was a fractured relationship that was compounded when our (provincial) president ran for the Liberals. On the last day he announced he was running for the Liberals. And I think that caused the chasm and some mistrust that our new president and our new PE (provincial executive) have had to repair. And it's particularly exacerbated in Dawson because we are known, I’m very proud of the fact that we are a very political district.

(Andrea)

With a lack of trust on all levels of operation, it is apparent that there was a desire for stability
that can be found in trusting relationships. However, there was a sense that once a trusting relationship had been established, either by direct connection or through a seemingly positive interaction between two people, these relationships become firmly entrenched. Respect is shown for those organizations that have developed trusting relationships internally within the organization, that appear to contribute to positive union and school board relations. Mark surmised the cause of this:

**Mark** There was a reason why the York District school Board got the first collective agreement by five straight collective agreements.

**Interviewer** Why?

**Mark** Because they had an easy-going culture, where they had a high up at OSSTF and a high up at the board who are friendly and said ah, let’s just figure this out. So you get this, we get that, we’re good, we’re good. And they hammered it out. And that would set the template for every other collective agreement that went out. It was always York that got the first deal. Always.

**Interviewer** Because of good relations?

**Mark** I’m assuming they were good relations. And that could just be because of a freak scenario whereby you may have had the head of OSSTF, and the director or superintendent of HR, for all I know, they started teaching together. They may be friends. And I don't know if that's the case for sure, but when you run into a scenario like that where you’ve got an element of trust across the table, it’s easy to do that. And I would argue that in most boards there's not a level of trust.

(Mark)

There is a reliance on personal relationships and personal reputation in decision-making. For example, if an administrator or superintendent had a reputation for being approachable, the union would be more likely to engage in discussion with them about a problem. If, on the other hand, the administrator had a reputation for being difficult to deal with, the union would circumvent any interaction with them. Mark provided some of the details about the union’s problem resolution process:
We generally always try to attempt, like if we ever got a call from a school, and somebody said my principal is trying to do this, my first attempt would be, talk to the branch president and say, go in to have a meeting with your principal, ask them why they're doing it, see if you can convince them that this is what the contract language says. This is the right way to go. That's the first step. The second step might be, depending on the principal - - if it’s someone we have a good relationship with, or someone who we don't know, we give him a call personally and we say: you realize the contract says this, you're supposed to do this. Are you ignoring it or are you just unaware or what's going on here? Past that point we start calling superintendents, and if it’s a persistent offender in our minds, someone who's just done this on a regular occasion, we might just say file a complaint form, because we have dealt with this before. Go forward to the superintendent and we will deal with it there. And I will say that that last scenario is not uncommon in the board right now as of the last couple of years.

(Mark)

And Andrea provided insight into the union’s relationship with the district school boards senior administrator:

And I had to say to him (the director of education) you don't manage me, I'm not your employee and so if I decide I don't want to talk to this person because I'm not getting anywhere with them, I'm going up the chain.

(Andrea)

Schein (2004) describes organizational culture as shared mental models. In the case of District 25, the interweaving assets of trust and relationships significantly contribute to the culture of the union, thereby affecting operations on all levels. And yet there seems to be a desire to foster a new culture of trust and cooperation. Both Andrea and Mark expressed this:

I have no choice but to be hopeful, even though past practice has shown that I probably shouldn't be. But I'm a naturally hopeful person - - that change will somehow someday come.
(Andrea)

We understand that it's important to have due process and to look for opportunities for people to be retrained, for example, given opportunities to learn, and sometimes the process fails and, I don't know... I mean everyone wants to do the right thing. But because of their fear of taking a misstep, they either drop the ball before even getting involved, or they fumble it along. It's not a collaborative approach. I wish that management and union could collaborate.

(Robert)

And although hopeful for change, some show concern that the process of change is a slow one. Mark contemplates the reason for this.

You might see the facade of change happening quickly, but at its core a lot of things would remain the same. So ultimately it's just chipping away at things. And the cultural moves, it's like chipping away at things too. In many ways I would say like the culture at the board as well. I mean, the past two or three directors that we've had come in, and I've been part of people going to the board to meet them, like when (the previous director) came in, you know he was famous for saying ‘we have to change the conversation’, right? And he was here for five years and when he said change the conversation, he meant change the culture. And it didn't happen. ...And the reason for that is the organization is too big to have a magic wand to change the culture.

(Mark)

Robert sees the obstacle to change as more of a structural problem compounded by fear.

And once we have a top-down hierarchical management structure, where people are discouraged from speaking as themselves, but rather as functionaries in an institution, in fear of litigation, we have a dehumanized structure. And I think that's probably where the problem started. And that's the biggest systemic problem.

(Robert)

Although there is always optimism, that changes in personnel within the school board will result
in better relationships, there is also a defeatist attitude expressed by some interview participants.

* I don't know how that change is going to move forward. 

* (Andrea)

A history of poor labor relations with the school board has spread through the system at all levels, resulting in a lack of trust between the union and the school board, the union and some school administrators, the union and some of its members, and often the union and their provincial affiliates. The absence or presence of trust seems to stem from individual personal relationships. The desire to forage these relationships at all levels within the organization is clear. But there is always an underlying caution; there is a hesitation in union response to the school board executive’s attempt to ‘change the conversation’, due to a past history of poor relationships. But the union executive body holds out hope for change. The pathway to change may come from the union closely considering the trust and relationship factors that have affected their organizational culture.

**Conclusion**

What really drives the culture – its essence – is the learned, shared, tacit assumptions on which people base their daily behavior. It results in what is popularly thought of as ‘the way we do things around here’.

* (Schein, 1999, p. 24)

The District 25 local union members and union executive learn about their culture through a number of devices, some visible and some not so visible. Just as I had read the mood of the school board that I had transferred to through the words and tone of my new principal, so do new teachers to the board learn about their school and their union through the sharing of stories in the staff room, by the disposition of their teacher colleagues and administrative team, through the personality of site based union branch presidents, and as a result of training opportunities offered by the union. Likewise, new union executives learn about the work they engage in by taking part in training sessions, and through participation in committees and meetings. Union training
sessions often include an analysis of case studies that are based on genuine issues that have taken place within a school, or at the district head office. The selected cases are often the most egregious examples of poor conduct on the part of the district school board or school administrators. Moreover, members hear about ongoing grievances and in-school concerns at monthly meetings. Here they frequently tell incredulous stories to their union executive members from other sites. Although members are careful to protect the confidentiality of those discussed, it is often not difficult to deduce who might be involved in these situations. The negative perception of school administrators and school board executive personnel is spread site to site, as branch representatives bring these stories back to their schools. This is not an insidious act. Who does not enjoy hearing a good ‘have you heard’ story? But the reputation of school board management is tainted in the process, and the negative culture within the school district becomes deeply embedded.

With a sense that school administrators and the school board’s executive managers are not to be trusted, the union launches a counterattack. This expresses itself in a plethora of protocols and processes that guide almost every union action. The union has procedures for meetings: who can speak, how they must frame their speech, and when they can speak, making the novice participant uneasy and silencing those who are not well versed in the dialect. There are protocols around elections, meeting conventions, duties of officers and everything in between (OSSTF, 2015). The thirty-one page local district Constitution and Bylaw booklet includes all aspects of union operations. The union’s executive takes pride in this tight organizational style of management; they believe their membership also values adherence to rules, procedures and process. But these very processes can exclude those who are new to their role, or not conversant in the highly structured language. In these cases the contributions of those with a dissenting voice are lost.

The union executive remains accountable to their membership by operating as transparently as possible. This shows itself in the number of information emails, meeting handouts, social media contacts, and ease of accessibility by phone or at face-to-face meetings that take place throughout the year. With so much information available, members often defer to the opinion of their school based branch president when trying to make sense of the assortment of material that is offered to them. The branch president carries with them the stories and experiences that have been communicated by the executive at meetings, thereby ensuring that the assumptions and
taken for granted perspectives held by the union executive are passed through to the membership at large.

The executive also offers a number of social events where they connect with members on a more personal level. Once each year the entire membership is invited to attend an annual general dinner meeting where elections take place and year-end business, is conducted in a very atypical manner, in that it lacks the formality of regular meetings. This meeting is viewed by the membership as more of a social event, although important decisions are voted on here. The executive team also hosts monthly meetings throughout the school year, thereby allowing for relationship building and the sharing of stories among the union executive members and their in-school member colleagues. These events contribute to the spreading of cultural values.

District 25 local’s organizational culture has developed over time as a defense against a perception of unprincipled school board operations. The sense of distrust between the union and the district school board plays out as each side builds up an arsenal of protective systems. These systems and procedures, designed to make decision making a well-defined linear process, actually complicate decision making as those within both organizations are bogged down by adherence to minutiae, thereby leaving little time to develop trusting relationships that could lead to more effective communication methods and the efficient resolution of issues.

There is a desire by the union to build trusting relationships, and some members of the board executive have tried with some success to operate in this manner. However, the Dawson District School Board has a high turnover of staff at the executive level. In the past eight years there have been three changes in board directorship and four changes in the superintendent of human resources position. The District 25 local executive has remained stable during this time. Changes in board senior administration, and changes in school administration often sever existing positive relationships, leaving only the union with enough organizational memory to sustain the organizational culture. A negative cycle of poor relationships ensues as immobile school staff remain fixed in their negative opinion of any management team placed at their site. School board management responds with a rigid enforcement of policy and procedure and the damaging systemic culture becomes more deeply engrained.

Perhaps the interactions between the Dawson 25 union local, and the Dawson Public District School Board, create the cultural conditions that exist in each. It is evident that the two
organizations are inexplicably tied together on a very human level. And it may be that neither organization is benefitting from the dehumanizing system of added processes and controls that are currently in place on both sides, due to the lack of trust throughout the system. In Dawson 25, the union members embrace and may even relish the conflict as they are proud of their strong labor roots and heritage. Yet their propagation of stories of real and perceived wrongdoing by the district school board may be holding them back from moving toward a more collaborative approach to labor relations, where groups on either side of a discussion seek out common ground on which to build an improved education system.
Chapter 5
Dawson OECTA Case

The Union District

On a warm fall day, a GPS vocalized directions down a residential street lined with modest homes in an old section of Dawson. The audio announced that the searched destination had been arrived at; an out of use elementary school appeared to be the location. After verifying the address that had been given by the union president of Dawson OECTA, and scanning the area for an office building or a sign identifying one of the surrounding properties as head office, I parked and headed into the school building looking for some help. As I walked down the hall of the elementary school where the classrooms were now being used for adult education and English as a Second Language classes, I noticed a small paper sign reading OECTA on a classroom door. I knocked and entered an old style elementary classroom: cursive-writing posters decorated the area above blackboards, a wooden ‘teacher desk’ was positioned at the front of the room. The only hint of the room’s function as a union office, was the positioning of student desks, which had been arranged in pairs along the center of the room surrounded by upholstered office chairs in boardroom fashion.

Behind the teacher desk I found John Hampton, president of Dawson OECTA. Expressing my surprise in locating the union office in an unoccupied elementary school, Mr. Hampton explained that the office space was offered free of charge to the union by the Dawson Catholic District School Board. The union, not wanting to waste members’ fees on frivolous expenses such as office space, had accepted the donation of a free office location. Mr. Hampton described the space as functional, but somewhat lonely as he worked in seclusion. Dawson OECTA did not employ an office administrator, and although most units the size of Dawson have three union officers released from teaching duties in order to conduct union business, their unit elected to release only the president full time; the negotiating officer was released from his teaching duties as required during contract negotiations. When asked why the unit required such a tight budget, Mr. Hampton explained how the funds generated from these savings were directed back to the members upon their retirement as part of a union fee reimbursement plan. The arrangement was implemented 15 years ago in response to a contract negotiation that eliminated retirement gratuities for teachers. These gratuities, or retirement gifts, still present in public teacher
contracts, were removed from Catholic teacher contracts as a cost saving measure for the board. The small retirement gift that Catholic teachers receive from their union as a result of savings they gain from occupying free office space, and having a minimum of full time staff, was the union’s efforts to have Catholic teacher contracts remain on par with those of public teachers. The union president believed that this ad hoc arrangement was unique to Dawson OECTA, as were many other idiosyncrasies that emerged through the course of the study.

One such peculiarity was the close relationship that had existed over many years between the president of Dawson OECTA, John Hampton, and the chair of the Dawson public school board’s trustees, Sean O’Hara. By contrast, the chair of the coterminous public school board of trustees had no such relationship with the public teachers’ union president. Throughout the course of the study, it became apparent that the relationship between the chair of the board of trustees and the union president notably contributed to the union’s organizational culture.

The contributors to this study come from a variety of positions within the union including president, chief negotiator, and in-school staff representative. As the union president is the only full time union employee, much of the information around day-to-day union operations comes from a single source for this study. Observations about union values, assumptions, communications and artifacts have been gathered from all interview participants who have held a variety of long standing positions within the union. As interview participants shared their stories, themes of sacrifice, struggle, and the teaching mission of the church, were common to each. These recurrent themes revealed themselves both through their interview responses and by observing their organizational operations. Although largely invisible to an outsider, the interviews provided an insiders view of this organizations imperative for a few non-negotiable expectations from their membership.

Artifacts

Environment

There are few visible environmental elements found within Dawson OECTA that brand it as a Catholic secondary teacher’s union. The absence of a unique office location, and the presence of a single member office staff contribute to the low-key image presented by Dawson OECTA. Those elements that help identify the organization: their logo, the union website, union published
newsletters and magazines, and even the office furnishings, and planned social events, each speak to the frugal, discreet manner in which they conduct business.

One identifying artifact, their logo, is a graphic image of an open book with a centrally placed cross image surrounded by the words OECTA Dawson Secondary Unit. It can be found in only a few locations, such as the website and adorning some union print materials. Its simple design, created by one of the unit’s members, is in keeping with the unit president’s philosophy of unpretentiousness. John pointed it out during the interview:

*That's our logo also, that's our symbol. We are not high on being visible. We are not high on the bling. I know for instance where my wife works, she's constantly walking around with jackets, with hats -- she even has pens. They even give members watches. When they go to the Labour Day parade, like everybody gets T-shirts. But that whole promotion piece of highlighting the bling, we don't do that. We are very, very subdued. Quiet. It's supposed to be a quiet organization. It's not a culture where we are required to be out there in the spotlight. We don't want that. That's not what it's about. We're supposed to be humble. Even Jesus Christ himself wasn't into the bling. And I mean -- he did okay.*

*(John)*

The unit’s website has been created and is maintained by a unit member. This represents another cost saving measure, and once again reflects the president’s philosophy of maintaining a low profile while directing union funds back to the membership.

*Our website, there's usually somebody that's a techie, and you can have it professionally done, or you can have it kind of half done by somebody that knows what he's doing. The staff rep at Saint John Smith Secondary School is the one that up keeps our website. He's the one that put it together. We don't pay anything for it. He's a volunteer. He's a techie type of guy that likes doing that kind stuff.*

*He upkeeps that website, and every unit -- actually provincial office runs a competition to see who's got the best website -- and some of the larger units like Toronto will spend thousands of dollars. You know what? My grass will always look better than your grass if a company is coming in to fix it. You know if I blow 5 or 6 thousand landscaping every
year I'm going to have better grass than you, right? I don't see a need for that. I'm very, very traditional. And I really don't see a need for that. I see a need for -- to give back to the members -- a basic website. This idea of blowing by 5, 6000 bucks a year on a website (that) I don't get back?

(John)

The union publishes newsletters and magazines to highlight teacher and student work benefitting the wider community. These published artifacts along with regularly planned staff social events, create bonds of friendship within the teaching community.

One of the symbols was the OECTA newsletter that came out that kept us updated not just on issues but on peoples lives and I remember that distinctly. They also had a magazine that I edited I worked on with Sarah and some of our friends called The Octaction and that was a booklet that was created every year of OECTA initiatives and pictures of teachers in action with kids inside and outside of the classroom. So The Octaction was a crucial symbol of what we stood for and what we did within the community. And the other thing I remember is a staff recreational volleyball games every Friday night after school. And that was very encouraged by OECTA and many staff participated in that so there was a lot of effort to make sure staff worked well together and teachers in general within the board had a close relationship.

(Steve)

The visible artifacts that help define the group are few due to the nature of the office environment, which is essentially a single staff operation located in a classroom space provided by the school board. The public displays of union activity take form as communication documents that highlight teacher and student engagement in volunteer activities. These publications depict the union and its membership as positive contributors to the community and highlight the social justice values found in the union statement of principles. The environmental artifacts though few, are elements that provide insight about the organizational culture of Dawson OECTA.
Rituals

The Rituals that Dawson OECTA engages in are largely based in religious ceremony and in the activities that take place during the union’s annual general meeting. Several significant faith based rituals were evident including the prayer, mass and faith based events and celebrations. John explains the importance of prayer to the organization.

*We start with prayer. And every meeting, I pull out -- everybody gets a copy of the (union) prayer. And every meeting we start off with a prayer and pledge and it's a common practice. Just like when I go to a board meeting. Believe it or not, even though it's an aggressive meeting, let's say it's a grievance meeting and I know there's going to be a lot of yelling and stuff, we start off with a prayer.*

Prayer also serves to unify opposing factions when difficult decisions must be arrived at. It also serves as a point of reflection when emotions hinder effective communications.

*(One time during a meeting) I remember saying to a board official, I don't want to pray with you today. My God, I will not share with you, because you're an asshole. And I was very, very aggressive with him. And he was so hurt by it. And I saw in his face. And my words -- words hurt. But, I thought, oh my God, it's not the fact that I called you an asshole, because it's not the first time, it's the fact that I'm not praying with you, and sharing my God with you. And I think those words were too strong, right? But yeah, the prayer is crucial to us. The rules are crucial to us. And we know that probably respect is also crucial.*

*(John)*

The union prayer is recited at the start of all union meetings.

*Creator God, we praise you, the source of all life. Renew our faith and guide us in our ministry as Catholic teachers. Let us touch the hearts and minds of those with whom we work. Lord Jesus, share with us your counsel, so we may choose knowledge over ignorance, wisdom over waste, peace over injustice, community over isolation and service over domination. Holy Spirit, nurture our growth. Inspire us to give birth to the*
creative powers within us. Let us come to the fullness of life promised in the Gospel. Amen.

(OECTA, 2015)

Traditional Catholic prayers precede board and union interactions such as negotiations or grievance resolution. Prayer is also used to help spread the union culture of faith to new members of the organization, as the common ground of knowledge of Catholic traditions allow for a familiar framework on which to establish working norms.

How do you know to start off with a prayer for instance? I think it's a basic belief that was taught to us when we were kids. As Catholic kids. But I remember delivering a speech to NTIP -- New Teachers Induction Program -- and being asked to speak to new teachers. This was a few years ago. The board was hiring a lot of teachers. I had about 120 teachers in front of me between elementary and secondary. And I remember thinking, I'm going to be speaking to all these young teachers. And thinking, what am I going to tell them? This is the union side right? The (school) board has already presented their side, but the board is also in the room. And I thought there is one common thing that binds us. It's the prayer right?

(John)

The Catholic ritual of mass serves to further connect the membership’s values upon which union work is grounded to that of the education system. John tells of how adherence to Catholic tradition supersedes even those contractual elements which have been mutually agreed on, as he recounts how a teacher complained about giving up their collectively agreed upon preparation time to attend mass:

If a mass is called when you're doing prep and planning (contractually agreed upon non teaching time during the school day), you have a right to prep and planning in the collective agreement. We don't touch it. You give up your prep and planning. You go to mass. As a teacher you're supposed to be an example to the kids in front of you. And even though you have a right in your collective agreement, there's an understanding during negotiations with senior board officials. You do not, not (emphasis by interviewee) go to
mass. And you go to mass because you're Catholic and educator, and you're supposed to show this to kids.

And so in our schools, teachers are supposed to go to mass once a month. Once in a while I'll get a teacher (who says) this is my prep and planning John, I got to prepare for a test. Meanwhile I am being asked to go to mass. (I say) I can't help you. I can't fucking help you. It's that simple. I can't be any more clear to you. I will not put up with it. I can't. We have a bond, and that bond is Jesus Christ. The board has is, I have it, and if the day ever comes when I tell you not to go to mass -- are you freaking kidding me? And the membership knows that, and the executive knows that, and usually I have one or two people on the executive who say, well you know public schools, Catholic schools, what's the difference? And I usually say I don't know what they do in the public board, because I don't work for them. I'm sure they have a lot of good family people just like we do. We have a lot of good family people here. I do know if the time comes that you don't feel comfortable here, there are applications everywhere across the province. Move on. (They said) John, you gonna speak like that to me? I am. I have no need to protect what you're saying. I really don't. I believe in the Catholic education system, just like I believe there are a lot of the people in the public system but at the same time, look, let's cut out the bullshit. Get your ass to mass.

(John)

Mass brings members of the Catholic community together. Board executives, union officials, teachers, trustees, students and community members are regularly invited to attend monthly school mass celebrations, further connecting the education community through the reinforcement of Catholic tradition.

It is a common practice across the province. And mass is celebrated once a month, in every school at least once a month in every high school. And what happens is I get invited to go to the masses by each school’s principal.

(John)
Professional development days usually have a faith component, as do events that mark important milestones such as retirement. John shares how the celebration of mass became a public demonstration of solidarity between the school board and the union when he was invited to attend a retirement mass for a veteran school superintendent:

_Everybody was there at this thing. Anybody that was anybody right? And I came in, and people are kind of looking at me like, what the hell is he doing here? He is always yelling at somebody! Right? And I came in and I went to the front pew on the right side, because that was where her (the superintendent’s) family was. And on the left side there was the chairperson, the director, the executive officers and all the bigwigs. And of course I don't go in and shake hands with them. That's not what I do. And so I went to the other side, and they're looking at me as if to say, what the hell is he doing here? The chair of the board (Sean O’Hara) came out of his way to say are you here for...? And I said I'm here for Anne (the retiring superintendent). She asked me to be here. That's wonderful John! And he shook my hand. The director came over and shook my hand and thanked me for being there... I think this type of respect is not shared as we go through jobs. But I think people see it. I think people see it. So no, I got nothing against most of them. But I do have a role to play. If I feel like telling somebody to fuck off, at the right time, I’ve got no problem doing it._

_(John)_

Rituals also show themselves in annual events such as the Pilgrimage, a community walk to raise funds for global educational initiatives, and the Christmas Basket drive that creates gifts for families in need. Both the union and the district school board support these community events as they reflect their shared value of commitment to global and community social justice.

_But more recently in recent schools the initiatives for global assistance through pilgrimages and other initiatives -- there are so many going on and many of them initiated by students now and the unions. The (union) associations are helping them and assisting them in developing these and helping students create a venue or vehicle for these causes._

_(Steve)_
Every December we congregated in the hall and each elementary school principal had put forth names of families that needed to receive — that were in need — and we created these food baskets. We got all the groceries on skids and brought them to the school or to the hall and then we had 150 boxes lined up and then we started filling them with food.

(Steve)

Another annual ceremony that helps to introduce newcomers to the union’s group norms and processes, and allows the local branches to communicate face to face with the provincial executive, is the Annual General Meeting (AGM). This annual event brings together approximately eight hundred delegates representing OECTA’s fifty thousand members (OECTA, 2015), to conduct union business and set directions for the upcoming year. The AGM is also a training ground for new teachers:

At the AGM we made a point of taking along one or two beginning teachers every year. We would have big social events for them.

(Don)

The Annual General Meeting has a social aspect, but for local presidents, there are significant tasks to be completed at these meetings.

When I went as a delegate it was a lot more of the social part. When I went as president, I was head of the delegation and my job was to make sure people were there and informed. And it was a completely different thing. I was in bed at 9:30.

(Don)

The AGM is an occasion to help draw new union representatives into the fold. Don relates how this happened for him:

It was actually at the AGM where you kind of catch the fever really.

Interviewer: And what were some of the issues at that time? Do you remember?
I really don’t. But I liked the atmosphere. I liked the intensity. I liked the debate. I liked the fact that it wasn't just collective agreements, that it was global education issues, Catholic education issues. I liked the whole aspect of it: getting up, and the challenge of getting up and speaking in front of 650 people. It's a stumbling block that some people never get over, and it took me quite a while to get over it. But once you get over it, it's a great feeling.

(Don)

There is a communal aspect in the rituals that the union and its membership engage in. Whether in the community of church, in joint prayer, in participation in fundraising activities for local or global projects, or at an annual gathering of union delegates, OECTA members engage in ritual activities in a manner consistent with their statement of principles and mission.

Heroes and Villains

While faith based beliefs underlie the approach to operations of both the union and the district school board, they also help solidify this alliance as the two sides come together to combat the villains of Catholic education, which present themselves as anyone who attempts to usurp their right to operate in Ontario. John describes how a recent public education trustees’ motion to eliminate the Catholic education system infuriated him:

She (a public school board trustee) moved a motion at a board meeting to get rid of Catholic education. The system works. (The director of the Dawson Catholic school board) gets along with his counterpart. There are a lot of meetings where they discuss things like transportation together. They get along with each other. I know (the director of the Dawson Public board) gets along with (the director of the Dawson Catholic board). I know the superintendents get along with each other. We don't have a problem with the public board. And I don't think the public board has a problem with us. But for her (the public school board trustee) to move a motion to get rid of Catholic education, that's a very, very aggressive thing to do. We would never do that. For instance, we are told over and over again as a Catholic union, not to compare any results with the public boards. There is no need for it. There's a place in Ontario for both groups to exist. I Sean O'Hara
(the chair of the board of trustees) understands that, and I understand that clearly. The common ground that we move towards is Catholic education.

(John)

The fight for recognition of their right to funding for Catholic education has persisted for many years. Heroes present themselves in the form of the early champions of Catholic education. Don explains the importance of the clergy to the spread of the Catholic school system in Dawson.

_The Catholic board in Dawson wouldn't be what it is without the nuns who gave of themselves. They were paid peanuts and they were principals without proper credentials. And as soon as it was mandated, a lot of them were turfed because they didn't have the proper academic credentials. So there's that. Plus the other overriding factor was the founding fathers club of St. John Secondary School, right from Bishop John to Sean O’Hara (the chair of the board of trustees). I mean they were the Catholic school board, and they flavoured and coloured everything; (the idea that) Catholic education is worth the sacrifice._

(Don)

The city of Dawson has many local heroes who are recognized as figures who worked tirelessly to establish and maintain schools that deliver Catholic education in Dawson. One such hero is the current chair of the board of trustees, Sean O’Hara.

_If it wasn't for Patrick Flannigan, Sean O’Hara (chair of the board of trustees), Bishop John, there may not be a Catholic school board in Dawson, or it would be a completely private institution. Now it did survive in some other areas within the province. But I have to think it was because of the same kind of people there. Because it was a struggle, and it was hard to keep it alive, and even when I started teaching they were holding raffles to raise money to keep the board open, to keep the schools open. And as I alluded to earlier, if it wasn't for the nuns, like we have, I think, seven Catholic high schools in Dawson, which I think is a pretty high proportion for our population, and fifty-some odd elementary schools. If it wasn't for all of that, and this pervasive attitude that we were talking about, that you know if we don't do everything we can, we're going to lose it. I_
would think there might be one private Catholic high school and a handful of Catholic elementary schools. But we grew up with this cloud over our heads, that you know, if we aren’t good little Catholic boys and girls, good little Catholic teachers, we are going to lose it all.

(Don)

Minor heroes were identified as those union members who successfully negotiated improved contracts and working conditions for OSSTF Dawson’s teachers and students.

We had some stellar people in Dawson and I think provincially Dawson is known for its part in tough negotiations, and people like Hans Schroder and Liam O’Reilly, and these guys were provincial leaders as well as local leaders, and creating situations that were good for kids and later for teachers as well.

(Steve)

A determined quest for survival is a common theme among interview respondents. The ties that bind the union to the board, and to their provincial counterparts, is dedication to the common cause of maintaining a separate Catholic education system; this work supersedes all else.

But the one thing, the common bond if you will, and I think that’s what you’re talking about, is the need for Catholic Education to survive in this province. I believe in it. Sean O’Hara (the chair of the board of trustees) believes in it. And I know he believes in it. We’ve never spoken about it, but I know he believes in it because when I leave home to go, to come to work, it’s rare the day that I don’t see his car at mass. This is 7 o’clock in the morning. He takes communion every day. He lives what he preaches. And that’s the difference. I have a tendency to believe the same thing. I don't think I'm as faithful as he is to the church, but I know that his salary, he's working far 17 or 18,000 bucks a year. And he's at work every day, probably at seven in the morning like I am. And he leaves the board late at night just like I do. There is a need to have that common ground. And when things are falling apart, we have to remind ourselves. And I know he does it because, I do it. Let's go easy here. This is about to get explosive.

(John)
Not only does this tie exist between the union and the board of trustees who is a highly influential figure within the district school board, it is also communicated to union members. The idea that Catholic education is distinctly different from secular education is reinforced at new teacher interviews, new teacher training and throughout a teacher’s working career during professional development faith celebrations, at school masses and during school events that mirror the Catholic liturgical calendar.

_**I remember being at NTIP. And going back to that what kind of message should I deliver. I have a 120 and teachers (in front of me). And I remember thinking you can't forget prayer. I remember telling these people: you have a long career ahead of you. Don't ever make the mistake of coming at people through their heads. Teach your kids about English, about pronouns, teach them about geography, teach them about math. Never forget that there is this thing that distinguishes us from other school systems. It’s prayer. Teach your kids to pray, come at them through their hearts. And the day you forget that as a teacher-- that is a common element that binds all of us. If you ever forget that, and if I ever forget that as a union president, I think Catholic education is gone.**_

*(John)*

A joint pledge of adherence to their faith, establishes a framework upon which the unions goals and values are built, firmly rooting their operations in Catholic tradition. This oath is shared between the union president, union members, school board administrators, and school board trustees. By operating on common ground bound by Catholic tradition, heroes and villains are easy to distinguish. Heroes arise from each of the Catholic education stakeholder groups: unions, clergy, trustees, and school board administrative personnel. Villains who work to dismantle Catholic education come largely from outside of the group.

**Communications**

_**I remember being at university in 1980, and an English professor said if you can't describe it without an ‘F’ word, there's a problem. That's the first thing. And the second thing is, most people read at a newspaper level, which is grade 8. Don't ever write anything to tell people what kind of big words you know. Keep it simple. All my information emails are very, very simple. And they usually involve a little bit of Jerry**_
Springer if you will, because they have to bring somebody in to read them, right? So if it is an email for instance, and I'll give you an example: Thanksgiving. The day before I was going to the funeral home for somebody who died of cancer, and I remember saying to people, look folks, I just came out of Garcia's (funeral home), because for the Portuguese, we go to Garcia's. I just came out of Garcia's after visiting a distant relative who died way too young at 46, and I find myself questioning the good Lord these days. Why him? Why not me? He's 46, so young. Is it my turn next? And I said, that's a very pessimistic attitude. On the positive side: I have a kid who's marrying a beautiful young lady. On the positive side, I have two deep freezers at home. I have rabbit; I have chicken; I have steak. On the positive side, I'm surrounded by a beautiful membership who still loves me, and an executive who still supports me. On the positive side, I continue to believe that God takes away the angels that he needs, and leaves the rest of us to carry on with his work. It was a simple message. It takes about, I would, say 35 seconds to read. You know, I didn't think it was that deep. It was just me, speaking. All my messages are that simple right? I am going to say that over 300 people replied. And they were so grateful. And they went on, and on, and you're reading all these emails, and some of them are tearjerkers right? I put out the meeting in an email yesterday, about our general meeting coming up when October 28: time 4 to 6 PM, CNM hall at Main Street. Purpose? To discuss your money. It takes five seconds for somebody to read it. It doesn't need any other stuff. I remember going to general meetings when I became a teacher in 1982, 1983, and you would be in there for about four or five hours. Roberts Rules here, Roberts Rules there, and all that stuff. And I thought, holy Jesus! We've got to start doing things differently!

(John)

Communications within Dawson OECTA are casual and familiar. Between the union president and the membership, personal phone calls, face-to-face meetings, and email are included in the communication methods. Likewise, face-to-face meetings are common in union interactions with the district school board, and the chair of the board of trustees. When formal communication interactions are required, the union provides training to their membership so they can speak in accordance with the standard meeting norms used at provincial meetings. Organizational stories
largely around the predominant theme of Catholic education’s ongoing struggle for autonomy within Ontario are communicated within the union, the school board and the wider community.

John, the union president, remains in close contact with his members through personal phone calls, visits to hospitals and funeral homes and quick email updates throughout the school year. The president feels that these informal communication channels have resulted in positive relations between the union executive and the membership. Whether visiting a member’s home, or welcoming members into their own homes, taking emergency phone calls or resolving issues outside of the regular work day, it was clear that the union executives interviewed recognized the importance of nurturing personal relationships.

_I have in my phone, we have in my computer at home, every member’s address, every member’s email. My phone runs 1600 phone numbers, 1600 emails. It runs everybody's personal email not just board emails. We communicate with the members, I'm going to say an average of three or four times a week. Email after email.

Every day I pick up my phone and I call five people that I've never spoken to. I do that at the beginning of the year. I start with the A's and then five people, five people, five people, five people. And I ask one basic question: what has the union done for you? Can we do it differently?’ ... By the end of the year, I've spoken to everybody at least two times. And by the end of the year, it was like hey - I remember John calling me! I do that.

_ Interviewer Do you do that now?

_John I do that still. I'm in my 10th year and I still do it. I still call members and say you know what, I know you're busy. No one picks up a house phone anymore. When you get a chance call me back, right? You can call me from your cell. You can call me on my cell. I have a couple of emails. I have phone numbers. Call me at home. Lets have coffee; let's have a glass of wine. But I do meet with the members. I do go to their houses. I constantly go to funeral homes. ... If it's a member, I'm at the funeral home. If it's a birth, wanted or not, I try to be at the hospital. And I do, we do send something to the members. I've been blessed in many ways. You've got beautiful members, but I think that constant interaction goes back to me being a PP - a people person. I think it must occur. Going back to your first opening statement about an hour ago, when you asked me about the individual, it's
crucial that you take care of the individual. If you don't, you’re beat. I think you do the member a disservice if you will, if you don't look at that person as an individual.

(John)

Don reflects on similar experiences when communicating with union members. He too developed an informal approachable style when connecting with his membership. Although these interactions were not always positive, both Don and John acknowledged that their job was to serve their members:

They would call me directly, they would email me directly, they would fax me directly, they would call the office, they would show up on my doorstep. I remember specifically I had a 13 hour day, and I got home and had two scotches, I went to bed and had been asleep a half an hour and there was a phone call. It was 11:30 and the phone rang right beside my head. And I picked it up and his teacher was giving me shit up and down, back and forth... I took calls in the shower, several times. See, I'm not sure everybody thought of it this way but I always, always thought about it this way. You're paying a hundred percent of my salary. I am working for you. There's nothing you can ask me that I can't respond to. I never lost sight of that.

(Don)

These informal communication methods are extended to communications with the district school board. Don explains how open communications between the union and school board administrators often helped resolve potentially explosive situations:

I remember once we had a clause in our contract that allowed for 2 urgent personal days that could be used each year by any teacher for any reason. And the board balked at it but they eventually agreed to it but then when they eventually agree to it... So I had 2 teachers that decided to take those 2 days to volunteer to work at the Canadian Open (golf tournament), and they ended up on the front page of the newspaper. But then they wrote on their (personal day request) form, confidential. Well shit hit the fan and the superintendent of human resources came at me and said I'm docking their pay, both of them, 2 days. Well I knew these guys. They were young guys with young families. And it
would've really hurt. So eventually I got the board to not dock their pay, if I told them I 
that would do a better job of getting to the teachers and saying what is and what isn't (an 
acceptable reason for a personal day). So that's a good example of what we were talking 
about earlier. It just came to me that that sort of thing probably wouldn't fly with a lot of 
other units and boards. There were many times when teachers would run out of sick leave 
and I would get them more. I would just go down and say this is really a tough situation, 
they really need it. Can we can we borrow on next year's 20 days? And invariably I 
would get them to say yes.

(Don)

Informal and transparent communications were practiced during times of board union 
negotiations.

I was chief negotiator, and at that time we wanted braces for our children. And I 
remember pushing the issue, and their financial manager said we can't afford that. And I 
remember that was a deal breaker for me. I wanted orthodontics. And I remember 
looking at him, and I said to him, how the heck is it that the teachers across the street 
have children that have availability of that. Don't our children have teeth like theirs do? 
And he (the chair of the board of trustees) looked at me and he said, you're right. I will 
make it happen. We have a deal. At that time everybody expected us to start writing the 
collective agreement, making sure everything, all of the clauses and articles were in 
place. And I remember reaching across the table and shaking his (the chair of the board 
of trustees) hand. We have a deal. And I remember his chief negotiator saying to me are 
you serious? (I said) I am serious about what? You're going to shake hands and walk 
away and get it together afterwards in terms of paperwork? And I said yeah from what I 
see, he (the chair of the board of trustees) is a man of principle. He will not go back on 
his word. And ever since then, we've only signed two or three weeks afterward because 
we have a deal. People don't go back on their words.

Interviewer And you trust him? (the chair of the board of trustees)

John I trust him. I trust the fact that - there are a lot of people around him that are 
assholes pardon the expression - but I trust him to his word. When he says we have a
deal, we have a deal. I'm the same way. There have been some deals, that afterwards, looking back that I say - I'm not signing that. But I have no choice. As soon as he said we have a deal, we have a deal. So I trust him. That type of relationship is rare these days. But there are people out there that still hold it that way.

(John)

Local meetings are informal in nature and loosely follow standard meeting operating procedures. Formal communication methods are saved for events such as the AGM. In these instances, Dawson OECTA ensures that their members have a voice by giving them training in Robert’s Rules of Order.

*Our meetings are run through, we are supposed to run them through Roberts Rules of Order. I know them, and I used to bring in, I still do, I bring in specialists that will teach once a year. They teach the executive Roberts Rules of Order.*

**Interviewer** It’s formal training?

**John** It's an actual training. Not every president does that. I like it because when we go to an annual general meeting in Toronto, the executive, if they go, if they’re delegates, then they can influence business up there. Sure, so I want to make sure they know the rules of the game, because not too many people are familiar with Roberts Rules of Order. At the executive meetings, we run them once a month, we run I am going to say, an average of four or five meetings a week - not executive meetings, but all kinds of different meetings. For instance yesterday, we ran the bylaws. The day before we had budget committee. So we have all kinds of different meetings. Those meetings are more relaxed. We don't follow Roberts Rules of Order.

(John)

Even though the majority of messages come directly from the district president, the role of the in-school representative as a conduit to the voice of the wider membership is recognized.

*I think the members are in charge. And I always tell our staff reps, listen to your members. If the time ever comes that you don't know what's going on in your school,*
you’re beat. That's the way it is. I think it's an open relationship. I think it's a transparent relationship. I think we are accountable to our members.

(John)

Many times they (communications) were just part of the general staff meeting and I would have my say, and it's strange because I'm sure that many reps would reflect the tone and attitude of the messenger of the person updating us on negotiations so I don't know how biased the information was when I gave it.

(Steve)

Many of the stories that are shared with members revolve around the struggle to gain and maintain the right to have a separate Catholic education system in Ontario. Both the board and the union share this story and embrace this struggle; this cooperation is not seen as a conflict of interest but rather a strong point of the system.

You have on one side Sean O’Hara (chair of the board of trustees) is very strong. But on the other side you also have a union that’s very strong. And they understand the need to keep God’s message.

(John)

But he (chair of the Board of trustees) exudes this is all about Catholic education. Yes, it's education. But first and foremost it's Catholic education. And that permeates the whole day, 24 hours.

(Don)

The union’s communication systems support the organizational model of tightly controlling their messages. The Dawson OECTA district local remains inconspicuous with regard to public communications. Past negative experiences with the media have made them wary, as newspapers and broadcasters tend to represent union members in an unfavourable manner.

When the Dawson Times (local newspaper) calls -- thanks but no thanks -- not interested.
Every time they crucify one teacher, it sends the message, getting back to my point about the media. It sends the message to the general public teachers are all the same. Every time they crucify a police officer and send the message they’re all the same, they’re all corrupt, beating people up. We don't hear the good work that they do. Knowing that, I'm very, very cognizant of the fact that the media has changed things. Cell phones have changed things. Cell phones in the classroom, that shouldn't be there, have changed things. Facebook has changed things. We tell our members, you’ve got to be very, very careful with social media. You’ve got to be very, very careful. It's nice that you got two seconds on television, and all of your relatives look at you on television, but don't go there. You are professionals. So media more than anything else has changed the way this job needs to be done.

(John)

New teachers become aware of the culture of both the union and the board prior to employment as each potential teacher must include in their application package a letter of reference from their parish priest (Dawson Catholic District School Board, 2016). The consistent messaging continues as new teachers participate in orientation programs and professional development opportunities throughout the school year. Faith based activities such as monthly mass and the celebration of events in the liturgical calendar further communicate the organizational goals of the union with those of both the district school board and the church. There is a no-nonsense attitude to the expectation that all staff embrace the cause of supporting Catholic education.

Once in a while my wife says to me, don't play God. You are not called to judge people. I'm not judging, I'm just telling them if you're inside the system, look, follow the system. If you're a part of this family, you should be part of the family. Cooperate.

(John)

With almost autonomous control over communications with his membership and the media, and a long-standing relationship with Sean O’Hara, the chair of the board of trustees and the most powerful member of the district school board executive, Dawson OECTA’s union president has few challenges to his process or authority. Through the use of frequent informal phone calls and emails, peppered with street-wise styling, he remains in close communication with his members.
These communications are casual, personal and unceremonious save for the shared traditional faith events such as mass and prayer that unite members of the educational community in a communal language and story that is centered upon the need to uphold the right to offer Catholic education to Ontario students.

Values

Dawson OECTA’s union interviewees shared their personal views of human nature and human relations, which trended toward a desire to connect as individuals as they answered the question: what is the right way for people to relate?

*People are all different. And because they're all different, there is a need to look at the individual. But there is also a need for competition. I think for the system to be healthy it has to be a combination of all of them, because you're dealing with people and people are all different. And if you start treating everybody the same way -- I understand the generic policies -- but even within board’s generic policies, they should have the opportunity for individuals to be able to stand out.*

*(John)*

**Don** My publicly stated goal was to build bridges between the school administrators and the teachers, because I couldn't see anything but good coming from that. (Ontario premier Mike) Harris divided us. I mean in any other work situation having administrators and workers in the same bargaining unit doesn't work, but in education it did work. We were on the same team. The principal was the boss. Everybody knew it. It worked very well. But this resonated well with the public for Harris. So he gained traction and approval with that. I mean most of us didn’t like it. There were some principals who liked it. They liked the wall being there, built up between, and they wouldn’t have had it any other way. But I think the collaboration between teacher and principal and vice principal can be a very productive healthy way to run a school. And it always was, in my experience. So I said to the board, I said to the principals, I said to the teachers, it's my personal goal to build bridges. And a lot of people appreciated that, saw where I was trying to get to, and I had some success.
Interviewer And so you see this as working collaboratively?

Don Definitely collaboratively, and that actually carried over into our dealings with the board. I’ve always felt it's either -- I never decided really whether it’s a fault or strength -- but I've always been able to see every issue from both sides. And sometimes it was a fault in that I am on one side, but I can see the other side, which helps when you're formulating some kind of a strategy.

(Don)

My background is in psychology, so I've always been interested in how people think and what motivates them. ... So I observed a lot of human nature and interaction of people. And I think by -- just by my nature -- and I think it's always an individual or personal thing, the way you approach people, and the way you interact with people. And it's always been a collaborative attitude that I’ve had, and I’ve really tried to think about them first, and I've always tried to fit myself, or put myself into their situation and stand in their shoes, before I had any further thoughts about the situation. I first did that, and then looked at the situation after that.

(Steve)

Themes of deep personal relationships, a desire to understand individuals, and collaborative relationships between members and district school board administrators, were evident in each of the respondent’s answers. These personal values were also publicly evident in many of OECTA’s stated objectives and operating procedures.

Organizational Goals

OECTA’s values, mission and vision as documented in their publicly accessible documents, speak to the centrality of Catholic faith tenets and to the manner in which they operationalize this work. OECTA’s Statement of Principles include:

- Promote Catholic values
- Foster the growth of confident, competent professionals
- Support our members in collective bargaining
- Promote spiritual growth in our members
• Establish and exercise our rights at all levels of educational decision making
• Build solidarity through actions that foster trust and collegiality
• Assist our members to grow professionally by providing access to information and resources.

(OECTA, 2015)

The union’s Mission Statement speaks to the significance of the Catholic faith as it relates to representing their membership:

Recognizing our uniqueness as teachers in Catholic schools, we are an Association committed to the advancement of Catholic education. As teacher advocates, we provide professional services, support, protection and leadership.

(OECTA, 2015)

Implementation of these principles and the union’s Mission Statement, was evident in conversations with union leaders. The promotion of Catholic values showed itself in their commitment to maintaining the traditions of mass and prayer within their daily school operations. This public articulation of faith sets them apart from both the secular public school system and other private school systems.

Operating Procedures

Evidence of traditional labour union pursuits such as bargaining and the maintenance of workers rights, was also apparent in interview data and in union documents. Also in evidence, was the union’s desire to meet their stated objectives to support the professional growth of their members. An example of this was seen in the manner in which the union helped their members prepare for progression up the union hierarchy.

For a chief negotiator, it's up to the president to teach them. We also have regional seminars. There is a structure in place that allows the chief negotiator to go into training at the provincial level. We do bring in people to teach him about collective agreements. He gets chosen by the collective bargaining committee; it's not just anybody -- he gets
chosen by 10 people. He has to be approved by the executive. Training for the health and safety officer, according to the Occupational Health & Safety Act the board can provide training for about a day. The proper courses take four days at the Ontario safety Association. We at this unit pay for them. They cost about $2000 for part one and another $2000 for part two, because we have to release people we want to site base model for health and safety. Before anybody can become a health and safety officer or a co-chair of the committee, we certify them. We pay for it.

(John)

The union sees this training as an investment in both the future of the union as an organization, and as a responsibility to spend union dues on those activities that directly support the professional growth of their members.

But there's a lot of training at the provincial level, and that training is paid for by the provincial office. Actually for every dollar that the provincial office takes in, $0.45 comes back to the locals, and a lot of it's in the form of training. We believe, I believe, and I believe our provincial office thinks the same thing, that your executive should be as strong as your president. If all else fails today, there should be at least five people ready to take over my job. I keep going back to of all people -- Trudeau -- he left behind Paul Martin, Jean Chretien, and leaders are known by the leaders they leave behind. I think we live by that motto. We are in a pretty good stead. And there's a lot of training and a lot of dollars spent -- $0.45 to the dollar. Once again I think OSSTF spends $0.21 on the dollar, but they're stronger than we are in terms of reserve funds. I think OSSTF has about 150 million. ETFO has about 250 million reserve funds for strikes and stuff. We like to focus our energy on other things. We only have about 39 or 40 million in reserve funds. And that's at the association level. The locals don't have reserve funds.

(John)
The goal of maintaining respectful working relationships is viewed as one of the foundational basis for operations.

*Interviewer:* Are there any commonly held truths found within that organization?

*Probably that people would interact in good faith. I think that was it. And I think that coming from a Christian background, and the board being established on Catholic principles, you would think that would override and be the foundation of any negotiation or talks that would regard the outcome of people that work in that situation.*

*(Steve)*

There is a commitment by the local and provincial branch of the union to align their actions with the provincial unions’ objective to arrive at negotiated collective agreements that best meets the needs of their membership. The aim of building solidarity through actions that foster trust and collegiality shows itself in the executives’ allegiance to their membership, which they staunchly support in times of contract negotiations.

*We (Dawson OECTA) are known for doing things right, not for doing the right things. I was offered jobs over the years with the board and I could've taken those jobs. My lips have always been red. Dawson OECTA has been known for having red lips, not brown lips. Never kissed up and kicked down. We don't do that. We don't eat our young. We take care of our own.*

*(John)*

But aside from negotiating monetary gains, the union also engages in membership protection actions including launching grievances if necessary.

*So representing teachers is a big thing for OECTA, and it should be. I mean there are a lot of people today in the papers and on talk shows that say that the time for the union is passed. But if the union stopped today, next month there would be horrible things going on out there if employers had carte blanche. Even in the Catholic school board, they would take advantage if they could. And there were lots of times they tried to, and we*
didn't get let them get away with it. It's interesting what you said about grievances, because 95% of the grievances that we ever launched, we won.

(Don)

With a strong connection to the values articulated by their OECTA provincial partner, Dawson OECTA makes important contributions to the development of union driven initiatives, including most recently the implementation of a regulation designed to achieve a fair and equitable system for hiring and promoting teachers.

I got involved because I thought members should have more rights. At that time, to me it wasn't really a question about money and salaries. It was more about rights. At that time I felt that a lot of people that were being hired were all related to board officials, and it was freaking me out that this was the case. And even in promotions, I remember when I got my principal qualifications, even promotions, you had to be connected to somebody - hence the reason for regulation 274. Actually Dawson OECTA had a lot to do with the regulation.

(John)

Supporting the goals of the labor movement including advocating for the rights of workers to living wages, has been a fundamental aspect of their work that arose from the historic wage gap between public and Catholic teachers due to inequities in government funding.

When I started teaching, the salary was quite low. That changed fairly rapidly. I worked six summers as a student at Cansteel (a local factory) and my first year teaching I took a 50% pay cut, to go from Cansteel as a labourer to a teacher with five years post secondary (education). So I thought it would be a good idea to support my family. And I couldn't. I really couldn't. I had to get a part-time job. So I guess that's where I was coming from.

(Don)
The union fought not only for teacher’s needs, but also for the needs of the students within the Catholic system.

But when I think of the days the early 70s to mid 70s when I started teaching you certainly did not go into the profession for money or the salary because it was definitely a vocation, a calling to do something that you felt you needed to do. Or your contribution to society, and money wasn't an issue, even benefits, sick days, all those items that create benefits were not really issues for us, we just sort of accepted what the union leaders thought we needed and we just went along with it and we thought well they want to improve our life, they want to improve the teaching situation. I mean when there was times that I thought, a lot of it was for kids in that they would want situations to be better for them. That was certainly something that I agreed with.

(Steve)

Soon after OECTA’s inception in 1944, the union began to engage in political action for the equal funding of Catholic schools in Ontario (Gelman, 1996). Today, OECTA’s organizational goals include those that focus both on the improvement of working conditions of teachers, the learning conditions of students, and the preservation of Catholic education. OECTA’s objectives of promoting workers rights through organized labour mesh seamlessly with Catholic values of social justice and human dignity. Each interview participant revealed that these values impacted their initial decision to become involved in union activities. Whether it was about fair hiring and promotion practices, fair wages, or a improving the learning conditions of students, the union leaders each demonstrated that they held strong beliefs about the significance of their work and strong ties to the organizational goals of their provincial union body.

I believe in DFR. I believe in Duly Fair Representation. And regardless of whether the member is right or wrong, that doesn't come into the picture. I don't question it. When a member gets accused of something, the first thing in my mind, for the main, part human beings are good people. If they become teachers, they are caregivers. And if they are caregivers, I know they go home to be families like I do. I don't care if they are board
administrators, I don't care if it is a common teacher. I don't believe that there are bad apples in the system, I really don't.

(John)

I also believe that we have a right in this province to a decent standard of living.

Sometimes people compare. Oh you only work so many days, you only get so many days of holiday, you get this, you get that. Great! Everybody should have that. Don't bring me down. Everybody should have that. That basic standard of living in a province that is so wealthy. In the country that is so wealthy. I believe we have a right to it. There are a lot of people here who came from other countries. They should have something to aspire to. And if it's a teacher salary, and if it's a teacher's working conditions, great.

(John)

Their recollections show how the seeds of these values had been planted and grown through their life experiences.

I need to tell you what a union is, because we as a union have done a piss poor job of promoting ourselves. Everything I have I owe to a union. My father was able to retire with a decent standard of living because of his pension. My father was able to grow a few tomatoes in the backyard, raise a few rabbits and even some zucchini. He was able to do it for 20 years after he retired, because of his union pension. Don't ever forget that it's your union that put your standard of living. It is your union that gave you your little heater in your pool. It’s your union that put the money in the busta (wedding gift). It's your union that allows your kids to go to university, and you have enough money to help them out.

(John)

Well I think back to my father when he came to this country he worked for the TH&B railway, and at that time they were building the railway from Buffalo to Dawson, and he was a labourer laying track for that project. So very intense work he often said that if he was sick one day then there was all these men lined up to take a job away from someone who couldn't keep up with the pace. And it was very intense work so I think a lot of
people, a lot of workers were taken advantage of with the heavy work, long hours, maybe not adequate pay to reflect the efforts, and I think probably that's how many unions were created, at least in this area.

(Steve)

The labour movements efforts to secure fair workplace treatment, and the efforts of champions of Catholic education for the survival of their system, are objectives that demonstrate the theme of personal sacrifice towards a greater goal. Each participant’s value system was shaped in part by an upbringing that included a family commitment to Catholic tradition.

Even when I was in high school, my parents had to pay for me to go to (grades) 11, 12, and 13 (in the Catholic school system). And my parents didn't have any money, but they had enough. And they thought it was worthwhile.

(Don)

And I remember, I would've been about 20, walking into the house on a regular basis, and my mom would be sitting in the kitchen. We walked into the back of the house and we walked in very, very quiet, because I was walking in late. And she would always say, and she would be reading the Bible. And she would always say, you should really think about confessing your sins. How do you know I was sinning? I don't know what you were doing out there, and I don't know what she even looks like, but if she was out there with you at 2 o'clock in the morning, she can't be that good of a girl. That was her line, all the time. You really should say a couple of prayers, and she would be reading the Bible, and it was not uncommon for her to read passages of the Bible to us. And there was five of us at home, and we would always start with a prayer. It was common. And so I think, I go back to that I go back to the Novenas in Portugal, when I was a little kid we were expected to go to mass every day. If you miss mass, then you got to go to confession because you sinned. But I came to Canada, and we started going to (a Catholic school). Cardinal Collins was one of my teachers believe it or not. And with father Collins we would go to mass every day. My mom would get us up about 6:45 so we could run to go to mass. So it was common. And this stuff is kind of ingrained in you.
With strong cultural ties to both Catholic values and labour movement objectives, a powerful relationship has developed between the union, the church and the district. Through a shared understanding and support for organizational goal, the alliance of purpose between the union, the church, and the district school board frames their work as both educators and leaders who influence the next generation of Catholics within the school community.

**Differentiation, Fragmentation and Integration**

Dawson OECTA has a simplified organizational structure, consisting of a single full-time union president who shares a close relationship with the Chair of the district school board of trustees. These two central leaders openly share a set of organizational values based on Catholic faith traditions. Dawson OECTA demonstrates an integration model of cultural dispersion. The union has some unique features, which help create an organizational culture centered on a unified focus of group values and a common framework of assumptions. The union president, although supported by an executive team, holds much of the power within the union structure. He, in partnership with the Chair of the board of trustees, form the most influential team within the district. They demonstrate an alliance in their conviction to put aside their differences in favour of supporting the system as a whole. Their loyalty to Catholic values which shows itself in a solidarity of purpose is clearly demonstrated to both union members and board administrators alike.

*The old mentality that Catholic education can survive, will survive at any cost. That's not true anymore. There's a lot of stress on the system, and I think people within the system have to get along with each other. But, yeah, that relationship with board officials is crucial, and we need to get along with each other otherwise we’re beat. Catholic Education will disappear.*

(John)

As both the union president and the Chair of the Board have held their positions within the system for many years, their powerful influence is ingrained in the culture of the district. Although instances of fragmentation and differentiation may be found within the ranks of union
membership, this study did not reveal any evidence of such divisions. The union executives interviewed did not sway from their opinion that a united stand by both the union and the board was required in order to ensure the continuation of an independent Catholic education system within Ontario.

Assumptions

The assumption that unites the union with both their membership and their district board is that their current status is in danger of being eliminated if those within the system fail to contribute to the ethos of Catholic education. These deep rooted values, born of necessity in the past as the clergy and Church faithful fought for government funding, remain in place today and are upheld by the union and the school board alike. The “joint learning process” (Schein, 1999, p. 20) that continues to inform those who are new to the system, is delivered by cooperative efforts between the board and the union. The DCDSB works together with Dawson OECTA in planning faith based professional development. The union and school board are in agreement around teachers’ obligation to attend faith activities during the school day, even when this is perceived by some teachers to be in conflict with the terms of the collective agreement. A commitment to the preservation of the Catholic faith, and a separate Catholic education system is a taken for granted shared belief within the system. Dissenters are not given a voice; there is always an option to find employment elsewhere. With the forceful alliance of school board and union executive holding firm to these core values, the established culture is sustained within the system.

With a foundation of common values, union and board bargaining takes on a more collaborative approach. John explains how both sides adopt a common sense process when engaged in bargaining:

> And I remember him (the board negotiator) saying to me we have $52 million allocated for secondary contracts. Right now,-- and this was back in 2006, 2007. Right now every time a teacher is away, by the end of the year, it amounts to about 2 million we take from the 52 in order to pay supply teachers. Every time a teacher is away, we take from that pot. Here’s the whole pot. What would you like to do with it? You write the policy, because every time one of your teachers abuses the system, it takes away from their families and the collective agreement becomes that much poorer. He made sense to me
that day. It was the first time I met up with him. He made sense and to me, it's that common sense element.

(John)

The “shared mental model” (Schein, 1999, p. 21) that both the union and the district school board hold, is founded on the values of the Catholic religion. Catholic tradition respects work as a vocation and a means to personal fulfillment. These basic ideals align well with the principles of the labor movement:

We were created with a vocation to work. The goal should not be that technological progress increasingly replace human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity. Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment. Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work.

(Francis, 2015, p. 128)

With both educational partners sharing in these fundamental assumptions, a powerful alliance emerges that is upheld by the leaders of each organization, thereby creating a solid foundation for the operation of the Dawson Catholic District School Board.

Conclusion

When it comes to culture creation and embedding, “walking the talk” has special significance in that new members pay far more attention to the walk than the talk. Especially important is what the leader attends to, measures, gets upset about, rewards and punishes.

(Schein, 1999, pp. 97-98)

As Dawson’s OECTA unit president conducts business in his borrowed office space, his members, under the direction of their district employer continue the work of growing the Catholic education system within the region. With nearly 60 schools serving almost 30,000 students, the board continues to expand in size, serving 40% of the region’s students. Both the
board and the union understand the importance of sharing the story of the struggle for Catholic education, as they develop into a large organization. A video on the board website (Dawson Catholic District School Board, 2016) recounts the history of the board and emphasises the struggle and sacrifice of staff, students, clergy and community, that helped to influence the political initiative to provide full government funding of the Catholic system in 1984 (Dixon, 2009). The theme of the video’s interview vignettes are ones of duty, sacrifice, teaching as a vocation, and ultimately success with many references to the need to continue the “teaching mission of the church” (Dawson Catholic District School Board, 2016).

Both the district school board and the union are firmly rooted in their common story of the commitment to survival. The added asset of a long-standing and collaborative relationship between the union president and the chair of the board of trustees contributes to the union and the school board’s shared culture, based on the need for continued vigilance in their mission to maintain and grow the Catholic education system in Dawson.

With two influential leaders presenting a common message and unified front to the union membership and wider school community, there is a strong incentive to move toward collaborative resolutions when disagreements arise. Their shared values, based on the strong traditions of their faith, supplant individual interests that have the potential to divide the groups and weaken the larger initiative which is that of preserving the system in which they operate.

Although OECTA’s organizational culture appears firm and unwavering, there may be underlying dissent among the members. The communication structure of the union is set so that all messaging comes directly from the union president. As I found in this study, with so few union executives to gather information from, it appeared at times that a single story of the ongoing struggle to ensure the continuation of Catholic education was presented. Each interviewee was unyielding in their communication of this message, but I couldn’t help but wonder if there were other membership concerns buried beneath this dominant theme.
Chapter 6
Findings

Those who understand the challenge of cultural change, recognize the enormity of this task because it involves the creation of shared systems of meaning that are accepted, internalized, and acted on at every level of the organization.

(Morgan, 2006, p. 138)

The study of an organization’s culture requires an exploration of the nature of those who operate within it. When comparing the two unions representing secondary school teachers in Dawson, many points of difference and a few of similarity were observed. The contrasts were largely identified in the text of interview data, but some became evident by observing the participants in the environment in which they worked and by comparing each union’s operating documents. This study’s conceptual framework recognizes both visible and invisible factors that help to shape organizational culture. The analysis adheres to this framework as the findings are related.

Artifacts

The organizational artifacts considered in this study include the physical environment in which the associations operate; the ceremonies, rituals, communication methods; and the identification of heroes and villains particular to each union’s operation. Distinct differences between the two unions were evident in the each of these areas.

Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OSSTF District 25</th>
<th>Dawson OECTA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rented office space</td>
<td>Free office space provided by the district school board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian furnishings</td>
<td>Repurposed furnishings from an elementary school classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time administrative staff</td>
<td>No administrative staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 full time union paid executives | 1 full time union paid executive
---|---
Absence of artifacts in the form of historical images or icons | Historical artifacts in the form of building architecture, office location in a classroom environment, and religious icons
Wall sized graphic of union logo | Small logo visible on union documents
Labour Council sign prominent in front window | No display of other affiliations

Table 1. Artifacts Comparison: Environment

Both District 25 and Dawson OECTA operate out of utilitarian spaces, but there are many environmental differences at the locations visited. The District 25 office is housed in a leased office space located in a strip mall in suburban retail area of Dawson. This space houses 5 full time employees: an administrative assistant and 4 teachers who have been fully released from their teaching duties and are paid through union dues as they work to address the needs of their membership. These staff members take on the roles of union president, chief negotiator, and a first and second vice-president. The office occupants each have a private working space; there is a common lobby where the office administrative assistant greets guests and fields phone calls. A large OSSTF logo on the wall the office boardroom, a Labour Council poster placed in the front window, and a sign reading Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation on the exterior of the building identify the space as a union office. The office area, furnishings and location are contemporary, functional and tidy. A sense of efficient industry is presented.

Dawson OECTA’s president works out of a classroom in what was once a neighborhood elementary school. The school is built of brown brick, commonly used in construction during the 1940’s and 50’s. There is a paper computer print out sign on the interior classroom door that identifies the space as an OECTA district office. A wide open classroom space serves as both an office and a boardroom. The union president is the sole occupant of this space, conducting business from a vintage wooden teacher’s desk. From here, he represents his members who are employed within the district’s secondary schools. The room’s décor is that of a 1960’s elementary school classroom with chalkboard lined walls, student coat hooks and posters of
cursive writing samples encircling the room. Bookcases line one wall; a series of binders on display are each decorated with a small union logo that has been designed by a union member. A crucifix hangs in a central position at the front of the classroom, branding the space with a traditional symbol of Catholic faith. The room is cluttered with a mix of old textbooks, posters, religious statues and relics of its past classroom function, mixed with office supplies and books used by the current occupant. The building, like the office, is silent as few of the rooms are occupied on the floor where the union office is located, enhancing the subdued atmosphere of the space.

Rituals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OSSTF District 25</th>
<th>Dawson OECTA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading of the pledge</td>
<td>Reading of union prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on parliamentary protocols, process and procedures</td>
<td>Emphasis on Catholic faith ceremonies including mass and prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 annual local general meeting</td>
<td>3 annual local general meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local annual general meeting as a social event</td>
<td>Annual local meetings focus on organizational tasks such as budget, elections and planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 annual Provincial AGM to conduct business and engage in social interaction</td>
<td>1 annual Provincial AGM to induct new members, conduct business, and engage in social interaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. Artifacts Comparison: Rituals*

District 25’s union local embraces few rituals other than the reading of the pledge at the start of each local meeting. The OSSTF union pledge states loyalty to the union’s constitution, bylaws, policies and practice; those processes that they so firmly uphold. It also includes mention of the goal of advancing the cause of education, and maintaining the honor, dignity and professional standards of educational workers.
Although not specifically ceremonial in nature, union member’s adherence to parliamentary procedure both at their local meetings and also in their provincial gatherings is an identifying characteristic that union executives recognized as somewhat ritualistic, in that it provides a common language from which to operate. This language is not taught in any formal manner to new members. Interviewees expressed that these skills were acquired by ‘osmosis’ and that often the lack of understanding about parliamentary processes left some members feeling excluded and unproductive. Rather than a uniting ritual, this ceremonial observance of strict processes for communications had alienated those who have not mastered its use. With no formal training offered to help new members become fluent in these skills, contributions from those who are not comfortable in parliamentary speech protocols are minimized.

These same parliamentary processes are used at the Annual General Meeting. These events are a blend of social and union work, that take place over three days in the spring of each year. In addition to provincial annual meetings that are attended only by delegate executive members, District 25 also hosts a large annual meeting of local members. This dinner meeting and social is the one large member gathering that takes place each year. Here, among the festivities, union business does transpire and votes are taken that impact upon future local union directions. Although process is still adhered to, this event stands out as a break with the usual strict attention to formal procedure, as union operations are conducted while the majority of the membership socialize and observe.

In contrast to the procedural rituals evident in District 25, prayer, mass and adherence to the Catholic liturgical calendar are rituals that the Dawson OECTA teachers’ unions have adopted. Each union meeting begins with the union prayer that reflects on the ties between Catholic faith and the ministry of teaching. Phrases such as “let us touch the hearts and minds of those with whom we work,” and “Lord Jesus, share with us your counsel, so we may choose knowledge over ignorance, wisdom over waste, peace over injustice, community over isolation and service over domination” (OECTA, 2015), emphasize the connection between the union’s actions as representatives of teachers, and the actions of the church as they share common values of service, justice and frugality.

Meetings between the union and the district school board also begin with traditional prayers of the Catholic faith, the words of which are foundational understandings of any person raised in
the Catholic tradition. The text of the most common prayers: the ‘Our Father’ and the ‘Hail Mary’, both defer to a higher power for the forgiveness of the sins, and to ask for divine guidance in the actions of those who speak it. The reciting of these traditional prayers establishes norms for meetings that are in alignment with Catholic ideals of service and humility.

Catholic mass is another shared ritual where union leaders and members participate along-side members of the school board. These community-based events draw together school board administration, teachers, students, and community members to regularly share in a ritual where those present admit fault and ask for support from their community for forgiveness for their transgressions. There is no hierarchy in mass proceedings; all participants associate equally in the shared space. The roles of liturgy reader, gift giver, gift collector, alter server and Eucharistic minister -- those who hand out the symbolic bread -- are filled by the community members in attendance. Only the priest, whom Catholics believe embodies Christ during the service, holds a superior position. This absence of ordering is in keeping with the Catholic belief in the “ultimate foundation of the radical equality and brotherhood among all people, regardless of their race, nation, sex, origin, culture, or class” (Greenwell, 2016, p. 1), and helps to establish an inclusive environment for mass participants.

Although union ceremonies and events are largely tied to Catholic faith traditions, the Provincial Annual General Meeting (AGM) is an exception to this pattern. At the AGM, local union executive teams join their counterparts from throughout the province to set union directions for the upcoming year, vote on representation, discuss educational issues at the local, provincial and global level, and introduce new members to the working norms of the group. The meetings are a blend of social interaction and union business. Dawson OECTA is vocal at these meetings. Their executives, each of who have been trained in parliamentary language, have a history of being active participants in the events proceedings. New members are invited each year to observe, with the hope that they will ‘catch the fever’ and become involved in the work of representing their colleagues through union activities. While social celebrations are a part of the experience, setting union direction and executive elections are at the heart of the AGM.
Heroes and Villains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>OSSTF District 25</strong></th>
<th><strong>Dawson OECTA</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrators and board executives as villains</td>
<td>Villains are those who threaten to dismantle Catholic education, largely found outside of the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroes are members of the union who have fought for union rights past and present (often politicians)</td>
<td>Heroes are those who championed Catholic education in the past (often members of the clergy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local heroes and villains</td>
<td>Villains are not individual people but a generalized idea of groups of people who do not support Catholic education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians as heroes and villains</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Artifacts Comparison: Heroes and Villains*

In the city of Dawson, the labor movement has deep roots, due in part its once strong manufacturing base. District 25 heroes are those figures, both in the union and inside the wider political landscape, that support the cause of organized labor. The District 25 president and members of the executive openly support labor focused political parties on their Facebook and Twitter pages. They encourage their members to support labor friendly parties in their communications, and rally alongside them at political gatherings. They also work to defeat politicians and political parties who are perceived to support anti-labor policies. These politicians, along with school administrators, members of the board’s senior executive, and staff who work in the Human Resources department of the board are presented as villains that threaten union purposes. Although no specific details around the characteristics of these particular heroes or villains were mentioned, interview contributors agreed that there was a combative attitude within the union, when members or the union executive perceive a challenge to the union’s autonomy of action as members of the teaching profession. The interviewees expressed that there
was a marked distrust of any process initiated by the district school board or ministry that might disrupt existing working conditions within schools.

Dawson OECTA joins their school board and district counterparts throughout the province along with their provincial executive in fighting a common foe: those who work to dismantle Catholic education in Ontario. With a unification of purpose, each group works collaboratively to bring about political and public pressure to uphold Ontario’s existing dual education systems. Villains are usually found outside of the Dawson district. But these villains do not just threaten OECTA, they threaten the entire system of Catholic education. The whole system response usually shows itself at the provincial political level, leaving Dawson OECTA as a minor player in the larger provincial action. The local union rarely ventures into the political realm, choosing instead to quietly conduct its business and leave political battles to their provincial partners.

Heroes of OECTA are those members of the clergy and lay members of the Catholic Church who established and supported the growth of the Catholic education system within Dawson. The strongest community member supporters have family traditions of participation in board operations as trustees, school administrators, teachers and members of the clergy. With a historical commitment to strong alignments between the establishments of church and school, these community members form a solid foundation upon which continued growth is built. Revered and sometimes feared, these community and clergy members are looked upon as champions of Catholic education. Their stories are told in the schools and within the community, thereby cementing their achievements in the ancestry of the city itself. The heroes and villains of the union are both heroes and villains of the school board. As such, these enemies’ and supporters’ presence contribute to the unification of the two groups, as they celebrate or combat them in the ongoing mission to uphold their system of education.

Communications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OSSTF District 25</th>
<th>Dawson OECTA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal use of parliamentary language and process at all meetings</td>
<td>Informal language and process at local meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal language and process at Provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>Frequent short emails from president with key information or personal messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent detailed emails from executive team with large amounts of information</td>
<td>Frequent direct contact from president by phone or email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequent direct contact from union executives</td>
<td>President initiates contact through phone calls, emails, visits at faith celebrations, at family events or in members or union presidents home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An executive member follows up with membership when members initiate contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed information handouts at meetings covering large amounts of information</td>
<td>Union material available on web site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office phone answered by an administrative assistant paid from District 25 funds</td>
<td>Office phone answered by union president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages sharing by in-school representative</td>
<td>Message sharing by president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No training in language of parliamentary process</td>
<td>Training in use of formal language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal language not understood or spoken by all members</td>
<td>Formal shared language in religious ceremony as carriers of cultural history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In house training events. Training stories (case studies) as carriers of cultural history</td>
<td>Training run by outside agencies or Provincial counterparts (no local stories shared)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal and personal use of social media</td>
<td>Limited personal information on web site or through social media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4. Artifacts Comparison: Communications*

As a function of union business operations, communication strategies have become more varied and complex in the last 5-7 years. With the emerging use of social media platforms and email communications, combined with traditional communication methods such as face-to-face
meetings and phone conversations, unions have a variety options when they wish to connect with their membership. District 25 uses a mixed communications system. E-mail, social media, phone conversations, and face-to-face meetings take place throughout the course of their work in order to keep their members up to date with current issues and concerns. Union executives distribute as much information as they have available. With an abundance of information to sort through, teachers often forgo reading the detail packed emails in favor of receiving messages from their in-school representative. This single figure then becomes a curator of the information. Filtered through the personal lens of the in-school representative, the information may take on an unintentional bias of perspective. When members opt to connect by phone, an administrative assistant fields and filters the calls.

Union executives make a point of visiting each school at least once each school year. Face-to-face meetings within the school, and one large annual district meeting are two opportunities where union members can meet directly with union executives. In keeping with the trend to social media, the president and some of the executive members send out personal tweets and maintain both personal and organizational Facebook and Twitter profiles, along with an official district web site that has a members’ only area, where all available information and communications can be accessed. This offers an array of communication options to members who wish to stay up to date with union news.

Process and protocol are in place during meetings, keeping this form of communication formal in nature. Monthly meetings of the executive and in school representatives follow Roberts Rule of Order. With no formal training offered in the parliamentary style of meeting conduct, members who are unfamiliar with the language and process are limited in their ability to contribute to the conversation. This reduces the influence only to that of long standing members who have picked up the jargon, since members must follow parliamentary process when speaking.

At monthly meetings, there is a fixed seating arrangement where the executive officers occupy a central table within a U shaped pattern. Here, many pages of information are distributed to in-school representatives to be shared with individual schools. The meeting follows a standard format with one agenda item dedicated to the discussion of grievances. In this portion of the meeting, the grievance officer and in-school representatives give accounts of violations of the collective agreement by school administrators or board executives. These stories make their way
back to the schools, where they are often passed among staff members either at monthly staff meetings when an allocation of time for union business is made available, or through informal discussion. Many grievances in Dawson go unresolved, resulting in high numbers of arbitrations. As the grievance and arbitration resolution process can take years, the negative reports of administrators who violate the collective agreement are kept alive and at the forefront of staff concern. In addition, negative accounts are shared in case study examples during locally delivered training sessions for new in-school representatives. Since many of these stories are extreme examples of administrative misconduct, they are often shared with the general membership at local union meetings, thereby spreading the perception of improper work practices at the school and the school board administrative level.

Dawson OECTA predominantly uses direct phone and email communication when connecting with its members. In addition, the union president makes a point of making personal visits to members for important occasions such as births and deaths, and holds 3 large meetings throughout the school year where all members are invited to attend and participate in union business decisions. The ceremony of mass regularly brings the president into school communities, as do the board wide religious celebrations that take place on spiritual events in the liturgical calendar, and on professional learning days.

The local union maintains a web site with limited information; the main page provides the contact information for only the union president. This ensures that those who wish to reach the union contact the president directly. The contact information for other members of the union executive staff is listed on a separate page. With no administrative assistant in place to screen calls, a phone call to the union usually results in direct connection with the union president.

Dawson OECTA’s local president also communicates with his members by email. His frequent messages sent out to members are brief and to the point, delivering only essential details in written form. The president chooses to provide detailed union information in the face-to-face gatherings held 3 times a year with the entire membership. These meetings take place in October, February, and May of each school year (OECTA, 2015). Each has a distinct purpose: finance, working conditions, and elections. The meetings are loosely based on formal meeting structures, as the president’s preference for straight talk ensures that after the initial union prayer has been recited by all, an informal approach is adopted that follows a set agenda in order to ensure that
the meetings are run in an expedient manner. Regular monthly meetings with members of the executive and committees are held at in the union office. Here, they do not follow formal procedures other than the sharing of the opening union prayer.

An informal and personal approach to communications extends to the president’s interactions with his members. He regularly meets with them in his or their home, at the hospital or at funerals during significant life events. He also has regular contact with his members by phone as he follows a daily pattern of calling five members to ask the questions: what has the union done for you and what can the union do differently? Members are free to respond to these questions in conversation with the union president either on the phone, by email, or in person over a coffee or glass of wine. The president believes that this personal approach to communications builds strong relationships between the members and their union.

There is an additional shared method of communication within the union and the membership community. This is the shared communication that takes place during Catholic faith celebrations. Here, the formal traditions of Catholic mass and Catholic liturgical celebrations such as first communion, confirmation, and often graduation ceremonies unite the union, its members, the school board, the school trustees, and religious members of local parishes. The language of communication found in the ceremony of mass is one that all participants are familiar with and conversant in. The Catholic tradition of communicating through the story telling of the catechism, along with the joint participatory responses of those who attend the celebrations, contribute to an inclusive sharing of positive stories among the membership, thereby acting as a unifying force between the union members, the district school board, and the parish faith community.

Values

Union Provincial Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OSSTF District 25</th>
<th>Dawson OECTA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong public education system</td>
<td>Strong Catholic education system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. Union Provincial Values Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capable teachers</th>
<th>Teachers that uphold Catholic values - teaching as a vocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive learning and working conditions</td>
<td>Solidarity through actions that foster building trust and collegiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty to OSSTF; comply with the policies and practices governing members</td>
<td>Obey the rules of OECTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member protection</td>
<td>Collective bargaining support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational services: training, certifications, resources and research</td>
<td>Promote professional growth through training Access to resources for members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications and political action: social justice, equity, international assistance</td>
<td>Global social justice focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decision making</td>
<td>Voice in educational decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size to support individualized attention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dawson was once a strong union city. Four decades of manufacturing industrial profits contributed to a solid middle class community that understood the value of the unions who represented the collective voice of the men and women that had worked to make local industry successful. Many sons and daughters of these industrial workers found employment in the teaching profession, as the local university had a teachers’ college. When these teachers entered the work force, they brought with them their appreciation of the benefits of organized labor. The promise of good paying jobs had drawn immigrant groups of Italian and Irish descent to the city. These groups brought their strong Catholic values and traditions with them (The City of Dawson, 2011). The impact of strong labour ties and strong religious beliefs has shaped the viewpoint of those who live in Dawson. Both District 25 and Dawson OECTA interview participants spoke of
the robust union presence in Dawson’s district school boards. They were proud of Dawson’s historical contribution to labor movement causes.

District 25’s broad union values align with the provincial union’s publicly articulated values. These are listed on their local web site and verbalized as the OSSTF pledge is recited at the start of each union meeting. The shared and joint interests of the membership are central to the values of the group. A dedication to public education and those practices that the union has adopted to support their vision of quality education such as controlled class size, positive learning environments, staff professional development, and shared decision making, are at the forefront of their work.

The interviewees from Dawson OECTA were also drawn into union activity initially because of their concern for the rights of members. But as time elapsed and relationships cemented, a more collaborative working relationship has developed due to the shared value of concern for the continuation of Catholic education in Ontario. Although labor issues still form the basis of the union president’s work, the path to resolution differs. The interview participant’s recollections demonstrated a commitment to the value of service over domination, and wisdom over waste, in the manner in which the executive was organized, and the frugality of their organizational operations. They also demonstrated a commitment to the development of leaders by the manner in which they focused on executive training, mentoring, and welcoming newcomers into the organization. The most prevalent organizational value observed was that of the ministry of Catholic teachers which is in alignment with OECTA’s provincial union values.

In addition to Dawson 25’s and Dawson OECTA’s publicly stated mission and values, some local themes arose.

**Local Union Values**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>OSSTF District 25</strong></th>
<th><strong>Dawson OECTA</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour movement</td>
<td>Maintenance of Catholic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on processes and procedures</td>
<td>Flexibility and Collaboration especially in areas that support Catholic education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member autonomy</td>
<td>Members as family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust of management and managerial practices</td>
<td>Trust in senior administration especially in the Chair of the board of Trustees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern of cost of poor relations</td>
<td>Concern for keeping members’ salary/benefits on par with public counterparts (cost saving initiatives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for local member training</td>
<td>Member training provided by Provincial office or outside professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social agenda at AGM</td>
<td>Educational agenda at AGM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership development through provincial training</td>
<td>Leadership development through internal mentorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions made by unit executive</td>
<td>Decision making made by union president in consultation with unit executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members approach union as required</td>
<td>President regularly reaches out to membership for input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern about lack of educational focus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern about frivolous expenditures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6. Local Values Comparison*

Many of District 25’s local values are not in alignment with those expressed by their Provincial counterpart. The most predominant local theme was that of an inherent distrust of management, sometimes at the school level but most often at the school board level. Interview participants spoke of a hostile relationship between union executives and the district school board’s human resources department. This negative relationship was well established, had withstood changes in personnel on both the side of the union and the board, and was viewed as the root of ongoing conflict, resulting in some of the highest numbers of grievances and arbitrations among
provincial locals. A second theme, related to the first, was Dawson 25’s reputation as a fighting underdog union. They expressed this in the manner in which they interacted with local school management, board management, and even with their provincial partners. Fearless of repercussion, and firm in their strong labour beliefs, Dawson 25 makes their voice heard on the community and provincial stage. The president stated that their reputation as a vocal protagonist had resulted in the Dawson 25 leading the way in voting down provincially negotiated contracts.

Some minor themes emerged that seemed contrary to the strong labor stance of the president. Three interview participants expressed concern about their union’s lack of educational focus, and the high cost of poor labor relations, which redirects money from improving educational conditions of students to pay for the cost of expensive union versus school board litigation. They also felt that the union executive spent union money frivolously, most often on social events including food and drink. Some union executives spoke of their concern for their member colleagues’ disengagement from union participation, and the careless manner in which business was conducted at their annual general meeting. It was apparent that there was a divide in the opinion of which values were most important within the union. The values most evident in Dawson 25 are those of member protection, member autonomy, and a member’s right to due process. Some of the broader union objectives such as contributing to a strong public education system, teacher training to improve teaching practice, positive learning and working conditions, joint interests over separate interests, and loyalty to OSSTF provincial were less evident.

In Dawson OECTA, it was evident that local concerns were consistent with both provincial union goals, and the mission of the district school board. Here, the predominant theme was the value of working towards the advancement of Catholic education; in certain cases, this objective took precedence over some aspects of the collective agreement. When teacher autonomy came up against collective participation in liturgical celebration, the scale was tipped in favor of the value of adherence to the ministry of teaching and the advancement of Catholic education. The absolute agreement between the district school board and the union executive around the need to uphold those Catholic traditions that delineate Catholic education from their public counterpart demonstrated the most predominant values of note.

Local values that were evident, concentrated on the theme of membership support. From maintaining minimal operation costs in order to give back union dues to their members, to
personalized communications, to encouraging leadership development from within their ranks, to member training and development, to inclusive meetings and shared decision making, local member welfare and the welfare of the local community appeared to be the value that the union president most fervently defended. The fact that the union president also had a strong personal relationship with the most influential member of the board or trustees was not viewed to be in conflict with his commitment to his members. In fact, interview participants spoke about school board relations in positive terms, and their accounts demonstrated a willingness on both sides to be flexible in order to arrive at mutually beneficial decisions, whether in matters of contract negotiations or member discipline. The trusting relationships that had developed between the influential members of the union and the school board, helped to calm tempers in times of conflict and unrest, and encourage opposing factions to seek out the middle ground during negotiations. A constant reminder of the larger objective to maintain Catholic education appeared to facilitate this outlook, giving pause to those who may consider becoming entrenched in an oppositional stance. Being united in core values that place the overarching goal of Catholic education preservation in the hands of both the union and the school board, has contributed to the collaborative nature in which they work together in Dawson.

Assumptions

In his book Images of Organization (2006), Garth Morgan speaks to the evolving nature of organizational culture:

Culture is self-organizing and is always evolving. Although at any given time it can be seen as having a discernible pattern, this pattern tends to be a snapshot abstraction imposed on the culture from the outside. It is a pattern that helps the observer to make sense of what is happening in the culture. But it is not synonymous with experience in the culture itself. (pg. 146)

This study captures the organizational culture of two teacher unions at a specific point in time. Therefore, the assumptions that are reported here may change depending on the make-up of the union executive members, the election of new school board trustees, changes in the district school board’s senior administration, the make up of school level administrative teams, and any number of the factors noted above that tend to influence organizational culture.
Local Observed Assumptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OSSTF District 25</th>
<th>Dawson OECTA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management as adversary</td>
<td>Management as partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of trusting relationships on all levels: between union executive members,</td>
<td>Trusting relationship between union president and district school board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between executives and union members, between union and school administration,</td>
<td>chairperson, the union president and members, the union executives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between union and board senior administration, between union and</td>
<td>and school board executives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>human resources employees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of organizational memory</td>
<td>Strength of traditional faith based memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal process and language understood and used by few</td>
<td>Training in the use of formal parliamentary language. Common language used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for local meetings and communications.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 7. Assumptions Comparison*

Differentiation Fragmentation Integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OSSTF District 25</th>
<th>Dawson OECTA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fragmentation of values where executive members align and realign based on their</td>
<td>Integration of values expressed by upper management and passed down as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>particular interpretation of issues or events</td>
<td>others who hold similar values and opinions are hired/promoted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Differentiation of values based on subcultures formed by an original</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grouping of union executives, and another grouping of newer union executive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The two Dawson secondary teacher unions have evolved along different paths. District 25 demonstrates a fragmented set of assumptions based on the alignment of like perspectives found within the organization. While some of the union executives showed a deep-rooted mistrust of management, others found themselves on common ground with management perspectives. While some of the union executives had a firm political labor perspective, others disagreed with union alliances to specific political parties. While some union executives saw the purpose of the union as one of improving teachers working conditions through the filing and settling of grievances, others saw the broader goals of improving the entire educational system and directing scarce resources to the needs of students as their primary purpose. This fragmentation of values has given rise to sub-cultures based on agreement of ideology within individual schools, and creation of cliques among union executive members with a subgroup of long standing union executives and another of newly elected union executives, who have formed coalitions in order to protect their positions within the organization. With divisive opposing forces taking place both within the ranks of the union members themselves, and from outside of the organization due to their ongoing disputes against their district school board administration, their energy is often split between these two divergent purposes, thereby weakening their effectiveness on both fronts.

In Dawson OECTA, the union president described how union and management relations had developed and improved over time. He attributed this in part to his long-standing relationship with the chairperson of the board of trustees. Another factor that played into the union’s relationship with the district school board was the ongoing pressure from outside of the union and the board to eliminate the Catholic education system. These external forces have caused the two organizations to cooperate against a common adversary. At the time of the study, OECTA’s most deep rooted taken for granted assumption was for self preservation: if the current system of Catholic education were to be dismantled, there would be no need for a separate Catholic teacher’s union to exist. Survival is a strong motivator. The president’s interview demonstrated his refusal to accept any stand from his membership other than that of complete compliance with the values and goals of Catholic education. Whether there is underlying dissent among the membership is unknown. Some requests by the researcher to speak with in-school representatives were turned down. But those union executives who did agree to an interview were steadfast in their view that Catholic education was worth fighting for, and they defended
their right to insist that their members comply with behavioral expectations that supported this mission. This integrated top down determination of common values becomes a powerful force in the selection, training, and on-going professional development of staff members. When a member’s behavior appears to disregard for these values, they are told in no uncertain terms to follow expectations or leave the system. A simple communication system of direct contact from the union president to the membership that follows the pattern of providing only essential information delivered in common language, serves to keep members informed and yet shielded from many of the details surrounding union decisions. When personal messages are shared, they take place in person or through short anecdotal emails that serve to connect the members with their union leader on an emotional level. In addition, ritual messages based on the shared understanding of Catholic values and tradition are communicated during mass and liturgical celebration. Public communications are augmented by the support of the chair of the board of trustees, who works together with the director of the district school board and the union president to form a closely bound circle of conviction that appears to be undisputed from within the ranks of the teachers who work there. The deep-rooted assumption is that the right to Catholic education is a cause worth fighting for and worth relinquishing some autonomy for.

Throughout the study, it became clear that there are key factors impacted the development of each union's organizational culture. Artifacts, which included environmental factors, rituals, heroes and villains, and communication patterns all contributed to the manner in which group norms had developed over time. Core values found in those items identified as a priority by the provincial body of each union, and those that had developed locally due to local conditions, also factored in to some of the cultural conditions present in each union. The most significant factor were the deep assumptions held by each group; uncovering these strongly held beliefs provided the most insight to the manner in which each union interacted with their district school boards, union members and the public.

When studying organizational culture, instances of all three methods of organizational alliances will most likely emerge. Some values and opinions will be articulated by management and held by a majority of members. Other values will be adopted by subgroups, and some beliefs will be
held by alliances that form and disband in ever changing formations (Martin, 2004). These groupings and regroupings in of themselves become an aspect of the organizational culture.
Chapter 7
Conclusions

This study began as a personal search for understanding around the employment conditions in which I had found myself. After gathering hours of interview data, and reading through a wide range of union published documentation as well as reviewing information self published by interview participants on social media, I am confident reporting the following conclusions from this study.

I have found that five major factors have contributed significantly to the development of the organizational cultures in Dawson’s secondary school teachers’ unions:

1) The ability of the organization to develop, articulate and implement a set of a few core non-negotiable values, which provide a framework for all of their work.
2) An organization’s use of a shared language.
3) A personal system of clear and concise communications that flows directly from the leadership team through to the membership.
4) The presence of trusting relationships within the organization.
5) Strong organizational memory fostered by the sharing of stories.

District 25 has broadly shared values around the rights of workers, but few specific organizational goals and even less of an agreement on how to best achieve workers’ rights. With no common shared framework to outline the processes required to realize improved working conditions for their members, the executive team has become fragmented in their approach to their organizational operations. This has resulted in the formation of sub-cultures through the alignment of like-minded members, and executive member infighting. In the absence of core values from which to function, executive members operate in silos within their personal value systems.

Fragmentation shows itself as internal conflict between union executive members. One interview participant spoke of a group of union executive’s “backroom political maneuverings” (Robert, 2016) and he recalled many examples of fragmentation among the executive team, when groups launched motions against each other, and when the interviewee was approached to participate in a secret bid to put forward an new undeclared executive candidate at an annual general
meeting. A second interview participant shared a related experience, as a member of a group of union executives whose union news publication was shut down, when a more powerful faction of the union executive disagreed with a published article.

Another challenge for District 25 is the lack of training for members in the parliamentary language required to participate in meetings. With a ritualistic adherence to parliamentary procedure in place at all union meetings, a knowledge of these processes is important in order for members, especially novice executives, to have an ability to participate.

One executive member referred to the current process of becoming comfortable with meeting procedures as one of osmosis. Even those members with long standing positions within the executive group, said they felt intimidated by the strict communication protocols adopted at meetings. Established members of the executive that been involved long enough to have mastered the language and processes, often use this skill to exclude the voice of those new to the group, thereby silencing them.

Often, the starting point for union engagement is through the role of in-school representative. As novice representatives lack the training required to speak at monthly meetings, their input is often not heard, thereby limiting their ability to share feedback from the school membership to the executive team. With little opportunity to contribute to the conversation through discussion and debate, in-school representatives often present information at the school level in the manner in which they receive it from their executive members. This message is dominated by a negative representation of board and school administrators. As the formal language is dominated by the voice of well established executive members, the shared common language of the group is found in the negative stories of administrative wrongdoing that are presented at monthly executive meetings.

Communications systems that are personal, direct and demonstrate a commitment to core values are also essential in the development of strong organizational culture. In District 25, the union executive reaches out to its members through a variety of avenues. The most influential personal communication system takes place at the monthly union meetings where the union executive meet with the in-school representatives. Here, incidents of school administrator wrongdoing and grievances are shared. Negative stories are also communicated in locally delivered training sessions during case studies, and once again when the in-school representatives bring these
accounts back to their schools and share them among the staff members. These stories can become altered or embellished as they are passed to the school level membership through the personal perspective of the in school representative. In District 25, the negative sharing of stories contributes to a culture of distrust.

Other communication forms such as lengthy emails and multi-page handouts are offered by the union executive, but often ignored by the membership in favor of personal communications by in-school union representatives, from visiting members of the executive, or at the Annual General Meeting. There is little direct interaction between the unit president and the membership, other than at the AGM. Social media, electronic communications, and the in-school representative become the predominant methods of information delivery. In the absence of personal relationships and direct communication opportunities, information may reflect the bias of the person distributing it.

There appeared to be a lack of trust within relationships on all levels within District 25. Along with a lack of trust between the executive team itself, the lack of a trust between the union local and the district school board was revealed by all interview participants, as was the sometimes strained relationship between the local and their provincial union affiliates. In addition, some study participants expressed distrust of local media, and concern about the possible harmful effects of social media, as both regularly portray the union in a negative light and contribute to the spread of misinformation. There is a lack of trust between a group of District 25’s teacher members and their union executive, the outcome of which is an opting out of union allegiance by this group of members. Unsatisfied by the traditional adversarial approach to union and board relationships, this sub-group has become disengaged from union involvement. The only generally widespread characteristic within the union is a lack of trusting relationships. This has resulted in the union’s limited ability to unite their membership in pursuit of joint objectives.

Dawson’s OECTA unit operates from a core value system founded on Catholic dogma. The union shares these foundational beliefs with school administrators, the district school board, the parish community, the school trustees, and their provincial union partners, most of who have been raised in these same faith traditions. There is an uncompromising alignment of objectives between these educational partners, making their strong organizational culture a key component in the survival of the system. The boundaries between workers individual rights and group
expectations are clearly defined, with group expectations trumping those of individual rights when a decision must be made between the two. With such a clearly articulated non-negotiable operating framework, union members understand that they must conform to the position of the group. These same core values are reinforced throughout the school year at monthly school masses, in regular faith celebrations, in professional development activities, and at union and school board interactions through the sharing of prayer and ritual celebration. The repeated act of aligning core values with educational objectives, establishes a unifying pressure between the union, the school board, and the parish community. When these groups are not in agreement with each other, ongoing opposition from outside forces who dispute their right to remain a separate faction of the education system, causes each player to work in a collaborative manner in order to present a unified public front.

The potentially negative aspect of this lockstep adherence to publicly articulated values did not emerge in this study. It may be that those who might want to speak openly about their views around Catholic education fail to do so because they are fearful of repercussions. Some invitations to participate in this study went unanswered by union executives. In addition, the union’s communication system is set up so that any member of the general public who tries to contact the union is connected to the union president. All public messaging comes directly from the president. With complete control over the union’s communications system, the union president controls all messages both within and outside of the union. Furthermore, the union president has a close relationship with the chair of the board of trustees. This powerful alliance may be intimidating to rank and file members who wish to challenge the status quo, thereby silencing their voice.

Having a shared language helps build strong organizational culture. Dawson’s OECTA union local uses a system of parliamentary language during their provincial level gatherings. Training in Robert’s Rules of Order is provided to all OECTA executive members so that they have a voice at provincial meetings. Local meetings are informal in nature, allowing everyone in attendance an opportunity to participate. The shared language of Dawson’s OECTA local is informal. The union president communicates with short and precise information communications, or with personal stories and anecdotes that help him connect to his membership on a personal level. There is an additional shared formal language found in the rituals of the Church. All members of the organization: union members, school administrators, and local
parish partners are familiar with this form of communication, and are regularly united in religious celebration participation.

The OECTA president prefers direct one to one communication with his membership whenever possible. These personal conversations become the most influential means of communication, as members share their thoughts and concerns directly with the union president during frequent interactions. Relationships are reinforced as the union president visits with his members during important life events and during monthly mass at schools throughout the system. In addition, he makes a point of reaching out to each of his members personally by phone over the course of the school year. When occasions arise for group communication to be distributed, the president sends out brief, informal emails or holds face-to-face meetings. Web based and social media communication platforms are in place. Maintained by a union member, these contain only essential information about union meeting times and contact information that leads directly to the union president.

Trusting relationships are evident in the close personal association that the union president has with his members and the chair of the board of trustees. There was also evidence that members of the union executive had trusting relationships with members of the district school board executive. These relationships serve to help opposing parties reach consensus in times of negotiation or when incidents that require staff discipline have arisen.

Dawson OECTA’s organizational memory is a shared one with the members of the district executive and the wider school community. This memory is one of struggle and sacrifice to obtain and now maintain public funding of the Catholic education system in Ontario. The stories of heroic Catholics are shared, celebrated and kept at the forefront of staff and student memory as they are recounted on their website, through publications and during liturgical celebrations. Public displays of solidarity between the union and the district during events such as Christian holidays and Catholic Education Week often include these same-shared stories, thereby keeping their history alive.

The conclusions of this study are consistent with the findings of other researchers in this field. Both Poole and Bascia have identified that Canadian teachers’ union values, include a commitment to the goals of organized labour. This study also supported this finding, although
OSSTF participated more openly in their demonstration of labour values in their participation in organized labour activities, parades and displays, and in their comments on social media. In addition, this research confirms Schein’s organizational culture model where assumptions: those deeply embedded subconscious responses by members of the group, are the most influential aspect of organizational culture. This research study showed the assumptions most influencing OSSTF, were those of distrust of management and management practices; for OECTA, the most impactful deeply held assumption was an effort to sustain a Catholic education option for Ontario’s students. Martin’s research findings about fragmentation, differentiation and integration within organizational culture were also evident in this study. OECTA demonstrated an integration of organizational culture where OSSTF’s organization was fragmented. Also evident in the findings was a link to Hargreaves work with respect to organizational culture based on organizational structure. OSSTF had an organizational structure that included a number of full time executives, each competing for their position, resulting in varied communications, thereby making the development of close trusting relationships between the union and their members and members of the district school board challenging. OECTA had a single full time union executive, which allowed for a streamlining of communications and operations, and allowing for a powerful relationship to develop between the head of the union and the chair of the board of trustees. Organizational culture, as an expression of both the past and present practices delivered through the sharing of stories, was another theme that arose in this study. This influence of past and present stories has also been recognized by Trice in his research of the culture of work organizations. Hatch also speaks to the power of communications within an organization as a contributor to culture. This study also exposed the effect on culture of a variety of communication styles; in the case of OECTA, personal communication methods were used to build strong trusting relationships. In the case of OSSTF, union executives were less involved in direct communications with members, giving the on site staff representatives a position of influence within the school community. By and large the conclusions arrived at in this study are supported by the current literature around the topic of organizational culture.

The research sub questions of this study each stem from the initial conceptual framework:

1. What are the cultural artifacts: the organizational rituals, language, stories and environmental patterns that help define each union?
2. What are the cultural values and norms: the social obligations, organizational
goals, group rules, policies and procedures of the union? How have they been established, and how are they maintained?

3. What are the basic underlying taken-for-granted assumptions that the organization is founded on?

What are the cultural artifacts: the organizational rituals, language, stories and environmental patterns that help define each union? District 25 has few rituals outside of the ritual use of parliamentary procedure during meetings. This process serves to divide the group into those who understand and can use the language to influence others and those who cannot. The stories shared by District 25 are largely negative in nature, and reflect the lack of trust between union members and their district school board administrators. These stories become the shared language of the group. The environmental pattern of the union executive hierarchy within District 25 contributes to the fragmented nature of the executive membership as the four full time union executive members have made alliances among themselves in order to maintain their position within the organization.

Dawson OECTA has uniting rituals around established Catholic rites that serve to connect the union with their district school board and the wider community. The stories shared are often positive and reflect the success of the system as a whole. Open opposition to well-established practices, are not tolerated. Those who do not wish to follow board and union expectations are invited to look for work elsewhere. The environmental pattern of union executive hierarchy within the unit is simple. With one full time union executive taking on the majority of the day-to-day work, communications are abridged and all major decisions are filtered through a single communication gateway.

What are the cultural values and norms: the social obligations, organizational goals, group rules, policies and procedures of the union? How have they been established, and how are they maintained? District 25’s values and norms have been well established over time. There has been little movement in the union executive’s composition over the past ten years. OECTA provincial largely establishes the union’s organizational goals, policies and procedures. But, District 25 often disagrees with provincial edicts, and has spearheaded counterattacks to provincial directives. This adversarial stance has been well established in District 25, and is viewed as a point of pride within the local.
Dawson OECTA follows values and norms that are shared not only with their provincial affiliates, but also with their district school board and the wider Catholic community. These values are maintained through regular union and whole membership meetings held three times each school year, through regular monthly celebrations of Catholic mass within the schools, through board wide professional development activities which often include Catholic liturgical celebrations, and through weekly parish based masses. Local union policies and procedures follow those expressed by their provincial affiliates. The one full time union executive takes an informal approach to proceedings at local meetings, but ensures that his colleagues are well prepared to speak in accordance to group conventions at larger provincial meetings. A constant pressure from outside forces that challenge the survival of Catholic education, serves to strengthen the union local membership, their provincial partners, the district school board, and the local Catholic communities resolve to demonstrate the worth of their system of education, thereby bolstering the importance of adherence to their shared values and norms.

What are the basic underlying taken-for-granted assumptions that the organization is founded on? District 25’s foundational assumption is that their members must be protected. But there was disagreement within the executive around who members needed protection from. Some executives spoke of a general distrust of management, others of their provincial union associates, and others still of members within their own organization.

Dawson OECTA’s taken-for-granted assumptions focus on the need to maintain Catholic education in Ontario. All union executives agreed that this was the single highest priority for the union. With all other concerns falling behind this overriding objective, union executives found themselves working collaboratively with their district school board partners. There was a fear that any division of purpose between the union and board executive would result in a weakening of the structure as a whole, and the potential for a dismantling of the Catholic education system.

How does the organizational culture of two teachers’ unions working in one community influence their relationship with district school boards, union members and the public? The organizational culture of the two secondary school teachers unions in Dawson profoundly influences the manner in which they relate to their district school board, their members, and to a lesser extent the public. District 25’s fragmented values contribute to division within the executive ranks and the wider membership. Their practice of sharing stories of egregious
behavior by school and board sets the stage for a culture of mistrust of management. This culture withstands changes in board personnel and is nurtured through the organizational memory of long standing union executive members. The union’s relationship with its provincial associates is also fragmented, with some executive members embracing provincial directions, and others working against provincial purposes. The public has little awareness of the current local union state, as union representatives carefully consider who they speak with in the media due to mistrust of media intent. A polarization of the membership has contributed to the formation of strong sub-cultures comprised of members who share common values.

Dawson OECTA’s cohesive core values help bring the district school board and the union to common ground in times of disagreement. An unwavering adherence to principles of the Catholic faith becomes the framework for not only the method of educational delivery, but also for the manner in which they approach contract negotiations, staff disciplinary action, and grievance settlement. The district school board executive, union members and the broader faith community are well versed in these principles. An organizational culture based on the structure of Catholic beliefs is well established. This culture has withstood the test of time, and ongoing challenge’s from outside forces to dismantle it only serves to strengthen the resolve of those within the system. With continued pressure to defend their beliefs and practices, they regularly share good news success stories with members of their community and the public. A mood of optimism and celebration of Catholic education is presented to the community and the media. The group shares a common language that endures within the practice of traditional rites, but outside of these events, informal and direct personal communications are preferred. When there are disagreements and opposition of opinion, the broader organizational goal of maintaining their system of education prevails. But within this tightly controlled culture there is little room for the dissenting voice. Opposition to traditional beliefs are rarely articulated. In addition, the strength of the system is due in part to the strong personal connection that exists between the president of the union and the chair of the board of trustees. There is a potential for a shift in power or a change in process once one or both of these highly influential people leave the system.

If culture is the normative glue (Siehl, 1983) that binds organizational processes, then Dawson OECTA is bound by a fixative that not only holds from within but also receives additional support from the ongoing outside pressures that work to pull it apart. District 25 has smaller
groupings of tightly bound cultures, which work in opposing forces from within the unit thereby weakening the organizational culture of the whole.

Implications

Educators and administrators working within Ontario’s education system may find that this study provides insight into those factors that contribute to the current cultural foundations found within their local teachers union and their district school boards, as the cultural influences of these organizations appear to be highly inter-reliant.

While these two union groups operating within one district may not be typical representations of Public and Catholic unions operating within districts throughout Ontario, the purpose of this study was to identify those factors that contribute to the differences in organizational culture. Therefore, the study’s findings would be of interest to those who are studying organizational culture in any association.

Union members and executives may find that this study contributes to their understanding of their unions’ values and assumptions that impact upon organizational operations. In addition, the study clearly identifies areas of similarity and differences between the two teacher unions that represent the majority of Ontario’s secondary school teachers. Further research into the specific qualities that appear to have the most impact on organizational culture may disclose important details about some of the minor themes that arose in the study, such as sexual stereotyping in union and school board organizations, and how organizational culture influences the collective bargaining process.

Those interested in further research in this area may consider investigating the possible correlations between the strength of union organizational culture and student achievement. Additionally, it would be valuable to see if union organizational culture influences a teacher’s decision to pursue positions of additional responsibility. It would benefit the wider educational community to study the organizational culture of other district school boards and their union partners to see if the elements identified in this study are significant in another setting.

Ultimately, the objective of educational research is to determine those processes and practices that help to create effective schools in order to support the educational needs of all students. It is
my hope that this research can further the development of collaborative union and district school board organizational cultures so that together they place student achievement at the forefront of their agendas.
Bibliography


Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study. Please take some time to read over the interview questions in order to prepare for your responses. Below you will see the research title being addressed by this study as well as the process and the questions. Your signature at the bottom of this document will serve as consent of your continued participation in this research study.

Study Title:

*How do the cultures of two teachers’ unions operating in one school district in Ontario influence their relationship with district school boards, union members and the public?*

Purpose of study being investigated:

To compare the organizational culture within two teacher unions in a region in Ontario: OSSTF, and OECTA.
The Interview Process:

Interview questions will be sent to participants in advance of the interview to allow respondents time so that you may consider your response.

- There are 8 formal interview questions;
- There will be 8 interview participants to in this study;
- Individual interviews will last 45 minutes to 1 hour in duration.

Interviews will be conducted in person or by phone.

Interview Questions

Part A: Leadership Background

1. When did you decide to become an active member in union activities? What were the circumstances around the decision to participate in union activities?

2. What is the right way for people to relate: competitively, collaboratively, communally, or individually? How would you describe how you work within the union? With union members? With the school board?

3. What are the basic underlying ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions that the organization is founded on. Are there any commonly held truths within your organization? For example, a commonly held truth may be the purpose of the union is to ensure the best economic outcome for their members. What are your union’s foundational beliefs?

4. How does the culture of your district senior administration impact on the culture within your union? Can you give an example where a change in district senior administration has caused this to happen?

Part B: Values

1. What are the working norms within your organization? How did you learn about them and how are they communicated and applied? Do you apply these norms when working with members? When working with school board personnel?

2. During your time as a union member/leader, what critical incidents or crisis have impacted upon union culture?
3. How would you describe the culture of your organization? Do you think it is different from the culture of other teacher unions? Why or why not?

Part C: Artifacts
1. What are the rituals, symbols and visible elements of your union and union goals?
2. Tell me about your unions customs and traditions.
3. Are there any stories that are routinely shared between members or used to help new members learn about the organization? Are these stories shared with the general membership? Are these stories shared with the general public?