chapter 1

Culture and Organization

"Just do a few little things for us, and—"
   "What sort of things?" Yossarian interrupted with belligerent mis-
giving. "Oh, tiny, insignificant things. Really, this is a very generous
deal we're making with you. . . . all you have, to do in return is . . ."
"What? What must I do?" Colonel Korn laughed curtly. "Like us."
Yossarian blinked. "Like you?" "Like us." "Like you?" "That's
right," said Colonel Korn, nodding, gratified immeasurably by Yos-
sarian's guileless surprise and bewilderment. "Like us. Join us. Be our
pal. Say nice things about us here and back in the States. Become one
of the boys. Now, that isn't asking too much, is it?"
                                                    —Joseph Heller
                                                     Catch-22

"**W**elcome to Technology Region—Working on America's Future," pro-
claim the signs along Route 61, the region's main artery. It is early, but the
nervous, impatient energy of high-tech is already pulsating through the spec-
tacular countryside. Porsches, souped-up Chevies, Saabs, indeterminate old
family station wagons, motorcycles, company vans, lots of Toyotas—the
transportational variety is endless—edge their way toward the exit ramps
and the clusters of "corporate parks," engineering facilities, conference cen-
ters, and hotels that are the place of daily congregation for the region's resi-
dents. As their cars jerk along, some drivers appear engrossed in thought,
a few may be observed speaking into tape recorders or reading documents
from the corner of their eyes. In "the region" the future is now; time is
precious; and for many of the drivers work has already begun.
   The parking lot in front of High Technologies' Lyndsville engineering
facility is rapidly filling. High Technologies Corporation—"Tech" to most
of its employees—is one of the larger, more successful, and better known of
the Region's corporate residents, and reputed to be on the "leading edge" of
the high-tech industry. The Lyndsville facility is home to a number of Tech's

more prominent and promising engineering groups. It is a low, sprawling, ugly building squatting behind the spacious parking lot carved out of the countryside a few miles off the highway. Between eight and nine o'clock, most of the day residents emerge from their cars to take over from the night shift—a few engineers pulling "all-nighters," the cleaners, and the security guards.

Jim Davis, a uniformed guard working for a contractor who provides Tech with security services, watches the morning inflow. He is hoping—like many in his position—one day to secure permanent employment at Tech, but in the meanwhile must settle for a temporary job at the company's boundary. As the first group of day people walk briskly through the front door toward the security desk where he has spent the night, he whispers in mock terror: "They're baaaack!" Passing the desk, the objects of his feigned concern perfunctorily flash small plastic Tech identity cards at him. He nods, not bothering to look closely at the proffered signs of full membership, and as he prepares to relinquish his post he explains: "Couldn't recognize 'em anyway. They all look the same." On his way out he adds: "Same thing every day. Bust their balls and think they're great. I dunno—this place is something else."

A casual outside observer might concur. The many hundreds of people employed at Lyndsville whose day begins as the night shift ends are, on the face of it, a fairly homogeneous group. The age is predominantly late twenties to mid-thirties. Almost all are white and—except for secretaries—most are male. Many would characterize their social status as "upscale." Almost all have college degrees, mainly in fields of the technical sort, with a majority in electrical engineering and computer science. The range of compensation is wide, but the average, by most standards, is well above the comfort zone. The dress code is loose, if rather drab. Business attire seems almost theatrically out of place and suggests association with the outside world, usually with "business types." The general demeanor combines a studied informality, a seemingly self-assured sense of importance, and a clearly conveyed impression of hard, involving, and strangely enjoyable, even addictive, work. Many routinely refer to their work as "state of the art"—of considerable quality, innovativeness, and profitability, and thus intrinsically, unquestionably, and self-evidently worthwhile.

Over the course of the workday, the Lyndsville facility appears to assume the character of its inhabitants: a combination of effort and informality, free-dom and discipline, work and play. After early coffees or breakfast in the open cafeteria, the labyrinth of cubicles that occupies much of the internal space becomes the stage for a seemingly chaotic variety of individual activities and complex networks of interaction that take place against a background of subdued but persistent squeaks and whirs from terminals, keyboards, and printers. At first glance, one would be hard pressed to identify differences in rank, status, or power. In many identical and modest-looking cubicles, people are tapping away at computer terminals. Meeting rooms on the periphery are occupied by small groups in apparently intense, occasionally volatile, and sometimes playful discussion. In the central lab space, people are wandering between tangled cables connecting rather unimpressive-looking pieces of equipment to each other and to the ceiling. The cafeteria is occupied throughout the day. Although it often appears that people come and go as they please, it is fairly well established that long hours are the norm. Those not present are assumed to be working elsewhere. Many will continue working through the evening, some on their company-provided home terminals. Others will do so in their minds and—a few would report—even their dreams.

The observer, comparing the glimpsed scenes of life at Lyndsville with traditional or commonsensical images of work life in profit-seeking corporations, might wonder what is going on here. Are things as chaotic and uncontrolled as they seem? How and by whom are the collective interests maintained? Why do people work so hard and claim to enjoy it? Is it the work itself that is intrinsically satisfying? Or is it something about the social context in which it takes place? More broadly: what is it like to work here? Is this the organization of the future? Or is it perhaps a futuristic revival of the past?

To insiders, the scene at Lyndsville is "typical Tech"—a way of life taken for granted, with nothing to puzzle over. If asked to address some of the observer's concerns, many would retort rather matter-of-factly that what one has observed are nothing more than manifestations of Tech's "strong culture." If this at first seems somewhat tautological, it soon becomes apparent that "the culture" is a popular explanatory concept, frequently used as a description of the company, a rationale for people's behavior, a guideline for action, a cause for praise and condemnation, pride and despair, a quality that is said to distinguish Tech from other industries and even from other high-tech companies. "It is," many would say, "what makes us what we are."

What do they mean? One answer is to be found among those who consider the "strong culture" their domain.

Tech Culture: A Managerial Perspective

On this randomly selected workday, the Lyndsville engineering facility is the stage upon which practical managerial concerns with "the culture" are acted out. A few miles away, in a fairly spacious but still modest office at Tech's corporate headquarters, Dave Carpenter is preparing a presentation to be given at Lyndsville later in the day. He is one of the more senior managers in the Engineering Division, and has been with the company a long time. Like many Tech managers, Dave Carpenter works extremely hard. He has recently gone on a strictly enforced seven-to-seven schedule that includes working breakfasts and dinners, but it is still difficult to get onto his calendar. He has just finished a series of long-scheduled "one-on-ones." The last one was with a Harvard professor wearing a fancy business suit and a prominently displayed visitor's badge, who has just been ushered out after exactly half an hour. ("Some kind of case study interview—culture and productivity; everybody wants to know what we're up to.") Dave has a few minutes to get his presentation together. The group at Lyndsville has recently been made part of his organization—"his world"—in one of the frequent reorganizations that are a way of life for Tech managers, or, as he would say, "a part of the culture."

For Dave, as for many managers, cultural matters are an explicit concern. Dave considers himself an expert. One wall of his office is covered with a large bookcase holding many managerial texts. Japanese management, in particular, intrigues him, and books on the subject take up a whole shelf. ("They know something about putting people to work—and we better find out what it is.") Dave has a clear view of what the culture is all about and considers it his job not only to understand, but to influence and shape it for those whose performance he believes to be his responsibility.

A key aspect of Tech culture, Dave often points out, is that formal structure tells you nothing. Lyndsville is a case in point. "It's typical Tech. The guys up there are independent and ambitious. They are working on state-of-the-art stuff—really neat things. Everyone, including the president, has a finger in the pot. The group is potentially a revenue generator. That they are committed there is no doubt. But they are unmanageable." How then, he

wonders, can he make them see the light? Work in the *company's* interest? Cooperate? Stop (or at least channel) the pissing contests? And not make him look bad? Dave knows that whether he controls it or not, he "owns" it—another aspect of the culture. And as he reads the company, his own future can be influenced by the degree to which he is credited with the group's success. And he is being watched, just as he watches others. His strategy is clear. "Power plays don't work. You can't *make 'em* do *any*thing. They have to *want* to. So you have to work through the culture. The idea is to educate people without them knowing it. Have the religion and not know how they ever got it!"

And there are ways to do this. Today Dave will make his first appearance at Lyndsville. He will give a presentation about the role of Lyndsville's various technical projects in Tech's long-term business strategy. "Presentations are important in this culture," he says. "You have to get around, give them the religion, get the message out. It's a mechanism for transmitting the culture." Sending and interpreting "messages" are a key to working the culture. Dave is clear about what he wants to accomplish: generate some enthusiasm, let them work off some steam, celebrate some of the successes, show them that they are not out on their own, make his presence felt. And maybe give them an example of the right "mindset." In "the trenches" (a favorite expression), he is sure, there must be considerable confusion caused by "the revolving door"—the frequent changes of management. Lyndsville reputedly has quite a few good and committed people. It is a creative group. But it is also considered a tough, competitive environment. Some say it reminds them of the early days of Tech, when commitment and burnout went hand in hand. Perhaps. The company has been changing. But some things stay the same. Dave remembers life in the trenches. He was "there" years ago, he has paid his dues—including a divorce—and he still feels an affinity for the residents of the trenches, some of whom he will meet today. And, as always, he is prepared. He reaches for the tools of the culture trade—the "road show" color slides used at yesterday's strategy presentation to the executive committee—and selects the ones for today.

Concern with the culture is not just the domain of senior managers; it has also spawned a small internal industry that translates global concerns, ideas, and messages into daily activities. Near the front lobby of the Lyndsville building, a large conference room is being prepared for more routine "cultural shaping." Alone in the room, Ellen Cohen is getting ready to run her

"Culture Module" for the "Introduction to Tech" workshop for new hires, also known as "bootcamp." It will take two hours, and if everything runs smoothly, she will stay for Dave Carpenter's presentation. ("It's a must for Tech-watchers. You can learn a lot from attending.") She is an engineer who is now "totally into culture." Over the last few years she has become the resident "culture expert." "I got burnt out on coding. You can only do so much. And I knew my limits. So I took a management job and I'm funded to do culture now. Some people didn't believe it had any value-added. But I went off and made it happen, and now my workshops are all oversubscribed! I'm a living example of the culture! Now I do a lot of work at home. Isn't this company super?"

She is preparing her material now, waiting for the participants to arrive. On one table she is sorting the handout packages. Each includes copies of her paper "A Culture Operating Manual—Version II"; some official company materials; a copy of the latest edition of *Tech Talk*, with an interview with the president and extensive quotations from his "We Are One" speech; a review of academic work on "corporate cultures" that includes a key to the various disguised accounts of Tech; a glossary of Tech terms; and a xeroxed paper with some "culture exercises" she has collected for her files over the years. "It covers it all. What is a Techie. Getting Ahead. Networking. Being a Self-Starter. Taking Charge. How to Identify Burnout. The Subcultures. Presentations. Managing Your Career. Managing Your Boss. Women. Over the years I've gathered dynamite material—some of it too sensitive to show anyone. One day I'll write a thesis on all of this. In the meanwhile I'm funded to document and preserve the culture of Engineering. It's what made this company great. 'Culture' is really a 'people issue'—a Personnel or OD [Organization Development] type of thing, but they have no credibility in Engineering, and I'd rather stay here, close to the action. It's a fascinating company. I could watch it forever. Today I'm doing culture with the new hires. I tell them about how to succeed here. You can't just do the old nine-to-five thing. You have to have the right mindset. It's a gut thing. You have to get the religion. You can push at the system, you drive yourself. But I also warn them: 'Win big and lose big. You can really get hurt here. This place can be dangerous. Burnout City.' And I tell them the first rule: 'Do What's Right.' It's the company slogan, almost a cliche, but it captures the whole idea. 'Do What's Right.' If they internalize that, I've done my job. My job?

They come in in love with the technology; that's dangerous. My job is to marry them to the company."

What does "Tech's strong culture" mean to Dave Carpenter and Ellen Cohen? First, and most broadly speaking, it is the context of their work life, a set of rules that guides the relationship between the company and "it's people." At one level, the culture offers a description of the social characteristics of the company that also embodies a specification of required work behavior: "informality," "initiative," "lack of structure," "inherent ambiguity," "hard work," "consensus seeking," "bottom-up decision making," "networking," "pushing against the system," "going off, taking risks, and making things happen." But, as the frequently heard metaphors of "family," "marriage," and "religion" suggest, the rules run deeper. The culture also includes articulated rules for thoughts and feelings, "mindsets" and "gut reactions": an obsession with technical accomplishment, a sense of ownership, a strong commitment to the company, identification with company goals, and, not least, "fun." Thus, "the culture" is a gloss for an extensive definition of membership in the corporate community that includes rules for behavior, thought, and feeling, all adding up to what appears to be a well-defined and widely shared "member role." [1]

But there is more. For Dave Carpenter and Ellen Cohen, as well as many others, the culture has a dual nature: it is not just the context but also the object of their work lives. The culture means not only the implicit and explicit rules that guide and shape their own behavior and experience of work; it is also the vehicle through which they consciously try to influence the behavior and experience of others. The "culture," in this sense, is something to be engineered—researched, designed, developed, and maintained—in order to facilitate the accomplishment of company goals. Although the product—a member role consisting of behavior, thoughts, and feelings—is not concrete, there are specified ways of engineering it: making presentations, sending "messages," running "bootcamp," writing papers, giving speeches, formulating and publishing the "rules," even offering an "operating manual." All are work techniques designed to induce others to accept—indeed, to become—what the company would like them to be.

This duality reflects a central underlying theme in the way culture is construed by many Tech managers: the "culture" is a mechanism of control. Its essence is captured in Dave Carpenter's words: "You can't make 'em do any-

thing; they have to want to." In this view, the ability to elicit, channel, and direct the creative energies and activities of employees in profitable directions—to make them want to contribute—is based on designing a member role that employees are expected to incorporate as an integral part of their sense of self. It is this desire and the policies that flow from it, many insiders feel, that makes Tech "something else."

The use of culture in the service of control in a modern corporation might seem at first strange, even unique, to those for whom culture is a concept more meaningfully applied to Bornean headhunters or to the urban literati. Tech managers, however, are not alone. A practical concern with culture and its consequences is widely shared among those for whom the corporate jungle is of more than passing interest.

Culture and Control

In recent years, the concept of "corporate culture" has captured the imagination of both students and practitioners of management. In a large and growing body of theory and research, scholars have attempted to define, refine, and apply a cultural perspective to the description and analysis of organizational phenomena. Despite the diversity, most would agree with Ward Goodenough (1970) that, most broadly speaking, culture is "in the minds and hearts of men"—a learned body of tradition that governs what one needs to know, think, and feel in order to meet the standards of membership. Others, like Clifford Geertz (1973), would locate culture in the vehicles for public expression of these meanings—signs and symbols.[2] When applied to organizational settings, culture is generally viewed as the shared rules governing cognitive and affective aspects of membership in an organization, and the means whereby they are shaped and expressed.[3] Of particular concern have been the shared meanings, assumptions, norms, and values that govern work-related behavior; the symbolic, textual, and narrative structures in which they are encoded; and—in the functionalist tradition—the structural causes and consequences of cultural forms and their relationship to various measures of organizational effectiveness.[4] Thus, culture and its family of concepts offer students of organizations a relatively new and increasingly popular vocabulary of description as well as a set of new theoretical variables with which to "build" (or recast) theory.[5]

Where we find description, however, prescription is never far away. Built

into the descriptive vocabulary and the theoretical relationships is the potential for practical use. It is made explicit by the many scholars who also have an applied interest and who address their work to practitioners and consultants interested in "diagnosing" and "changing" cultures in the service of organizational effectiveness.[6] Moreover, a large and profitable body of popular managerial literature has capitalized on these ideas, proclaiming a relationship between culture and the "bottom line." Terrence Deal and Allen Kennedy (1982: 15), for example, claim that with a strong culture, a "company can gain as much as one or two hours of productive work per employee per day." The business press has granted the cultural perspective significant attention,[7] and it has made its way into the daily discourse of practicing managers and other members of business organizations as a routine aspect of organizational and corporate language. Thus, organizational culture is not only a powerful and popular etic concept; it also has a significant emic dimension.[8]

The prescriptive view focuses on the explicit and active design and management of "organizational culture." What is in the "hearts and minds" of employees, it is suggested, can and should be managed in the organizational interest. Academic observers typically point to (and often implicitly recommend) the combination of freedom, commitment, and emotional involvement that this kind of work environment supposedly generates. For example, Edgar Schein (1985) views culture as based on deeply held—often unconscious—beliefs shared by employees. In Schein's view there is an observable and potentially manageable relationship between the behavior of senior managers and cultural outcomes. In a disguised description of Tech, he suggests that the central beliefs include the equation of the company with a family where members take care of each other, and the view of members as both strongly motivated and capable of governing themselves. Others make their positive evaluation of strong cultures more explicit. In a typical statement, Rosabeth Kanter (1983: 203) describes a disguised version of Tech and claims that work in such companies offers "a high" that "may be the closest to an experience of 'community' or total commitment for many workers, a dramatic, exciting, and almost communal process brought to the corporation."[9]

The popular managerial press is even less restrained. For example, in their best-selling *In Search of Excellence*, Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman (1982) convey their ideas with almost evangelical fervor.[10] Manage-

ment, they claim, is the art of creating strong corporate cultures by "shaping norms," "instilling beliefs," "inculcating values," "generating emotions." "Strong cultures" are based on intense emotional attachment and the internalization of "clearly enunciated company values" that often replace formal structures. Moreover, individualism is preserved; for employees, the companies "provide the opportunity to stick out, yet combine it with a philosophy and system of beliefs . . . that provide the transcending meaning—a wonderful combination" (p. 81). The ideal employees are those who have internalized the organization's goals and values—its culture—into their cognitive and affective make-up, and therefore no longer require strict and rigid external control. Instead, productive work is the result of a combination of self-direction, initiative, and emotional attachment, and ultimately combines the organizational interest in productivity with the employees' personal interest in growth and maturity.

Thus, in the view of proponents of strong cultures, work in such companies is not merely an economic transaction; rather, it is imbued with a deeper personal significance that causes people to behave in ways that the company finds rewarding, and that require less use of traditional controls. The company, in this view, harnesses the efforts and initiative of its employees in the service of high-quality collective performance and at the same time provides them with "the good life": a benign and supportive work environment that offers the opportunity for individual self-actualization. Broader implications are often drawn from this depiction of corporate life. The prescriptive literature goes so far as to propose that such corporate cultures are a solution to the problems created by an allegedly overbureaucratized and underperforming organizational society.[11] To accomplish this, managers are offered (often for a price) a variety of methods and techniques: participative decision making, overt uses of rituals and ceremony, the management of symbols and meanings, explicit formulation of a "corporate philosophy," and so forth.[12] All supposedly produce the kind of employee whose orientation to work, Deal and Kennedy (1982: 9) approvingly suggest, is captured in the following quotation: "I feel like putting a lot of time in. There is a real kind of loyalty here. We are all working this together—working a process together. I'm not a workaholic—it's just the place. I love the place."

The concern with culture detected at Lyndsville and the convergence of practical and theoretical notions of culture and its management in the academic and managerial literature reflect a widespread and growing manage-

rial interest in finding innovative solutions to the foremost problem of management: the conflict of interest that lies at the heart of the relations between organizations and their members. Purposeful collective action, whatever its circumstances, requires the coordination of activities of a diverse and heterogeneous membership. There is, however, an inherent conflict between the demands organizations place on the time and efforts of their members and the desires and needs of members when left to their own devices. Thus the age-old managerial dilemma: how to cause members to behave in ways compatible with organizational goals. Bureaucratic work organizations, Amitai Etzioni (1961) suggests, have traditionally relied mainly on utilitarian forms of control: the use of economic power to elicit compliance with rules and regulations from a work force concerned mainly with maximizing material rewards.[13] The rhetoric of culture, however, indicates a shift in managerial sensibilities to a different form, one that Etzioni refers to as *normative control.*

Normative control is the attempt to elicit and direct the required efforts of members by controlling the underlying experiences, thoughts, and feelings that guide their actions. Under normative control, members act in the best interest of the company not because they are physically coerced, nor purely from an instrumental concern with economic rewards and sanctions. It is not just their behaviors and activities that are specified, evaluated, and rewarded or punished. Rather, they are driven by internal commitment, strong identification with company goals, intrinsic satisfaction from work. These are elicited by a variety of managerial appeals, exhortations, and actions. Thus, under normative control, membership is founded not only on the behavioral or economic transaction traditionally associated with work organizations, but, more crucially, on an experiential transaction, one in which symbolic rewards are exchanged for a moral orientation to the organization. In this transaction a member role is fashioned and imposed that includes not only behavioral rules but articulated guidelines for experience. In short, under normative control it is the employee's *self*—that ineffable source of subjective experience—that is claimed in the name of the corporate interest.[14]

Attempts to implement normative control in industrial settings might be considered "something else," but the ideas on which it is founded are not new. In his classic *Work and Authority in Industry*, Reinhard Bendix (1956) identified an inexorable trend in the evolution of managerial ideology from the early days of Frederick Taylor's "Scientific Management" to the formu-

lation of the theory and practice of "Human Relations" by Elton Mayo and the numerous scholars and practitioners who followed him.[15] For Bendix, the essence of the trend was a growing managerial interest in the psychological absorption of workers by organizations. This represented, in his view, a systematic encroachment on previously private or unregulated domains of work life—irrational sentiments and attitudes—a sort of creeping annexation of the workers' selves, an attempt to capture the norms of the workplace and embed control "inside" members.

Practice has, in a fashion, followed theory. Many observers have noted the historical evolution of managerial practices designed to facilitate the incorporation of the worker into an industrial community. These include graded careers, increased job security, long-term employment, the rise of internal labor markets, the emergence of training and education functions, the professionalization of management, the growth of personnel and human resource management as managerial disciplines, decentralization and participatory decision making, job redesign, benefits, and stock ownership plans.[16]

How is one to account for this trend? Most generally, managerial interest in normative control has been seen as a consequence of the massive bureaucratization of the workplace in the twentieth century and the emergence of the business corporation as the dominant form of industrial organization.[17] Yet the explanations vary. For sociologists of bureaucracy, the need for and the mechanisms of normative control are built into the very structure of bureaucracy.[18] As Bendix (1956: 251) suggests, a shortage of control is inherent in bureaucracy: "beyond what commands can effect and supervision can control, beyond what incentives can induce and penalties prevent, there exists an exercise of discretion . . . which managers of economic enterprises seek to enlist for the achievement of managerial ends." Consequently, as Robert Merton (1957: 198) has pointed out, effective control requires that "ideal patterns of action are buttressed by strong sentiments which entail devotion to one's duties." In this view, the relationship of discretion and control is particularly pronounced in the case of the rapidly expanding white-collar labor force and for the types of work, technologies, and labor processes characteristic of what Daniel Bell (1973) refers to as the "post-industrial society."[19]

Management theorists present a similar argument but cast it as the solution to a practical managerial problem. This perspective was formulated most clearly by Chester Barnard (1950), one of the most influential of the

early management theorists. In his classic *The Functions of the Executive*, Barnard says that in order to elicit the willing and predictable contributions of effort required by a large-scale organization, traditional economic inducements must be supplemented by an effort to change the "states of mind" that govern the willingness to contribute. This includes the "inculcation of motives," which means shaping not only work behaviors and activities but also the self-definitions of members as social actors, their world views, and, most crucially, their emotional responses to their condition. In Barnard's view, this required "a process of deliberate education of the young, and propaganda for the adults" (p. 152).[20]

Marxist scholars add a critical twist to the same argument. Richard Edwards (1979), for example, suggests that bureaucracy leads to the need for and the use of increasingly sophisticated forms of control. This, he explains, is due to the inevitable conflict of interest between workers and management that arises in capitalist systems as a result of managerial attempts to control the labor process. Control based on ownership, he argues, inevitably leads to worker alienation, and consequently to overt conflict and decreased efficiency, and to a managerial search for more and better control. Thus, the development of forms of control is a dynamic process. In its most recent form, bureaucratic control, the impersonal rule of company law and policy is coupled with a growing tendency to enforce not only obedience to the rules but also an internalization of the rules and an identification with the company.[21]

In sum, the recent popularity of the idea of strong corporate culture may be seen as the culmination of a pronounced historical trend in managerial ideology and practice toward forms of normative control. In the most general terms, shaping the employees' selves in the corporate image is thought to be necessary in order to facilitate the management and increase the efficiency of large-scale bureaucratic enterprises faced with what the managerial literature refers to as "turbulent environments": rapid technological change, intense competition, and a demanding and unpredictable labor force.[22]

However one views its causes, the evolution of organizational forms based on a managerial ideology of normative control leads to heavy claims against the self—the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of members of work organizations. More than ever, domains of the self once considered private come under corporate scrutiny and regulation. What one does, thinks, or feels—indeed, who one is—is not just a matter of private concern but the legitimate

domain of bureaucratic control structures armed with increasingly sophisticated techniques of influence. The significance of this development goes beyond the boundaries of organizational life. The power of organizations to shape individuals raises the more general problem of the relationship of self and society, a problem that has long tantalized social theorists: how to balance individual freedom with collective action, private and public life, civilization and its discontents.[23] The bureaucracies that govern work life are one arena—and not the least of them—where these questions are played out in the course of daily interaction.

Thus, understanding the practical consequences of the ideology of normative control in bureaucratic settings becomes a matter of acute importance. How effective, we must ask, are the corporate attempts to influence employees? What is the experience of the people against whom such heavy claims are made? What kind of people are produced in this process? In short, if the member role represents normative demands, what are the normative responses and how are we to evaluate them?

The Consequences of Control

Recognition of the trend toward normative control has brought with it two distinct views of its consequences. For supporters and proponents, it is the wave of the future, a solution not only to the economic and organizational problems that plague a declining West but to its deeper existential dilemmas as well. In this view, there need not be a conflict between organization and individual: organizational forms based on normative control are potentially liberating; and personal development and growth are possible in the service of corporate goals. Elton Mayo (1933), the architect of Human Relations, troubled by the dehumanizing potential of industrialization and its political ramifications, felt that finding meaning and satisfaction through work associations was both necessary and possible. Numerous others have taken up this theme.[24] In this view, the inherent conflict between the individual and the collective may be transformed into cooperation that is in the interest of both company and employee. Normative control is conceptualized as an appeal to the potential existing in people. To the extent that they are shaped, that shaping is framed as a process of education, personal development, growth, and maturity—in fact, a development of a better, healthier self, saved from the threat of anomie and alienation and the pathology of conflict.

If supporters of normative control in industry promise a self regained, critics warn of a soul lost. This imagery seems to have haunted the postwar sensibilities of observers of the corporate world. C. Wright Mills in his classic *White Collar* (1956: xvii) claims that large bureaucratic organizations "usurp both freedom and rationality from the little individual men caught in them." In *The Organization Man*, William Whyte (1956: 397) warns, somewhat more colorfully, of the insidious influence of organizations on the personal and emotional life of members, where a manager is tempted into a "practice of a tyranny more subtle and more pervasive than that which he means to supplant." "No one wants to see the old authoritarian return," Whyte states, "but at least it could be said of him that what he wanted primarily from you was your sweat. The new man wants your soul." In this view, then, normative control is a sophisticated and manipulative form of tyranny in the workplace, a threat to both freedom and dignity, an unwarranted invasion of privacy. Forced to explain the lack of overt coercion and the seeming cooperation of the victims, Whyte portrays the individual experience of this tyranny in a different light: "It is not the evils of organizational life that puzzle him but its very beneficence. He is imprisoned in brotherhood" (p. 12). This imagery has persisted. More recently Edwards (1979: 148) conjures it up to warn that under normative control the "workers owe not only a hard day's work to the corporation but also their demeanor and affections." Here, "control tends to be a much more totalitarian system—totalitarian in the sense of involving the total behavior of the worker. Hard work and deference are no longer enough; now the 'soulful' corporation demands the worker's soul, or at least the worker's identity."

The criticism does not stop here. Not only is normative control, in the view of its critics, the moral equivalent of tyranny; it is also dysfunctional. Some, like Edwards (1979), claim it cannot last: management, he argues, must necessarily betray the loyalty and commitment it evokes because the cost is too high. Others, like Whyte (1956) and Merton (1957), suggest it undermines organizational performance. The dire consequences of successful normative control are, in their view, embodied in the "organization man" or the "bureaucratic personality," for whom identification with the organization overrides all else and leads to the inversion of means and ends, a preference for conformity, a predilection for groupthink, a fear of creativity and initiative, and a dearth of ethics. Still others suspect that normative control is largely rhetoric, a disguise for more traditional practices, and in

any case not practical.[25] Although not entirely consistent with each other, all agree that there is cause to worry about the kind of society, the kind of organizations, and the kind of citizens such forms of control produce.

Thus, the recognition of the rise of normative control generated conflicting and often contradictory images of its consequences and led to a continuing debate: is normative control a form of tyranny or a movement of liberation? Is it a failure, or does it work only too well? What the various debates concerning the practice, meaning, and consequences of normative control have in common, however, is a notable paucity of evidence coupled with a distinct preference for hyperbole, abstraction, and metaphor. That the managerial mind was and is fascinated by the possibility of normative control of subordinates is easy to document, well established, and not very surprising. With regard to the actual practice of normative control and its consequences for those subjected to it, the evidence is neither clear nor coherent. Most evaluative attempts have rested on a rather limited empirical base, often using as a basis for their claims the rhetoric of management taken out of context and away from the point of production. Students of managerial ideology focus heavily on the rhetoric of spokespersons and its interpretation and seem to ignore the actual settings within which normative control is formulated and applied and its meaning for those for whom it is formulated.[26] There is scant contextual evidence concerning the use of ideology, its meaning in the context in which it is used, the practices associated with it, the nature of life in organizations supposedly resorting to normative control, and the consequences for individuals. Particularly lacking are detailed studies of white-collar, professional, and managerial workers, among whom the trend is supposedly most pronounced.[27]

How then are we to evaluate the widespread managerial concern with "strong cultures"? On the face of it, as we have seen, the essence of the ideology of strong cultures is a restatement and a reaffirmation of the doctrine of normative control. This formulation, moreover, attempts to preempt the well-known criticisms. In the strong corporate culture, its proponents assert, normative control offers increased freedom and autonomy rather than tyranny, individualism rather than groupthink, creativity rather than conformity; and, for those concerned with the techniques of implementation, it is claimed to be technically feasible, as illustrated in numerous anecdotes (some using Tech as a model) in the self-help managerial literature. If anything, in the gospel of strong culture, what was once seen as the breeding

ground for the diseases of bureaucracy is now heralded as its antidote. Normative control—or at least the rhetoric associated with its practice—once again rides high.

Are these claims justified? Does the strong corporate culture indeed foster a form of affiliation that generates personal and collective "highs"? Or is it a new guise for tyranny in the workplace—an unwarranted invasion of privacy driven by commerical interests? Or is it just another cycle of empty managerial rhetoric that obscures the real and unchanging nature of work organizations and the people they employ? More important, what do strong cultures in the workplace have to teach us about the never-ending tensions between individualism and collective action, freedom and commitment, control and autonomy, that lie at the heart of an increasingly bureaucratized society? To the extent that work organizations are powerful actors in our society, and with the soul—or the self—at stake, addressing these questions becomes a matter of considerable urgency.

Some answers may be found at Lyndsville among those for whom "Tech culture" and its demands are an everyday reality. Are the people whom we encounter there happy automatons? Brainwashed Yuppies? Self-actualizing human beings? Do they think of their experiences at work as authentic expressions of themselves or as stylized roles? Is the Lyndsville engineering facility a prison or a playground?

On this randomly selected morning, a number of different experiences of the strong culture are being played out in the large, open office space beyond the conference rooms where those who live the culture spend their day. In one corner of the building, Tom O'Brien is hunched over his terminal, his back to the opening of his cubicle. He is wearing earplugs to close off the rest of the world. Things are going well, he would acknowledge, almost too well. His promotion just came through. He is now a "consulting engineer"—a title coveted by many Tech engineers. His contribution to a number of key projects is apparently being recognized by the faceless mass that determines reputation in the "technical community," and he is getting more and more electronic mail from all over the company. In his group he is considered the resident expert on XYZ technology. This year he earned close to 60K, and for the first time he was given stock options—the secret sign of inclusion. His current role is rather vaguely defined, and he can get involved in almost anything. In fact he is expected to, and he is aware of the pressure to "make things happen" and how it works on him. "That's

the culture—designed ambiguity. It sucks people in," he says. He has been invited to join a number of task forces, and is thinking of learning some of the business issues. ("A little night reading. And time out for some of the hoopla. I'll go to Carpenter's presentation later. Once I'd have laughed, but when you start getting around you need to go.") He considers his position a good balance between remaining technical and getting into management. Recollections of his burnout episode a few years back and a brief and unsuccessful stint at a crazy start-up company have lost their painful edge. He is back with Tech. And he seems to have arrived.

Right now Tom is trying to understand the intricacies of a failing project. Rick Smith, the project manager, was finally removed, and someone has to figure out what the hell was going on: the technical problems and also some of the people issues. ("A lot of egos involved!") Tom was the natural choice. It temporarily adds a few extra hours to the working day, but it's fun, it's a challenge, it's involving. Today he came in earlier than usual, and he will probably spend most of the weekend on it. "Boy, did they ever screw up," he says as he stares at the screen. Every now and then an audible beep announces the arrival of an electronic message. He fights the temptation to flip screens. "It'll take a while today just to go through the mail and stay current. Things sure pile up when you're riding the wave. That's the culture. You have to learn to work it. And to protect yourself. People can get swept away. It's great. Like the joke. You get to choose which 20 hours to work out of the day."

Many at Tech would consider Tom a standard success story, a living affirmation of "the culture" and the claims of its proponents. On the face of it, he appears to have successfully incorporated the member role. The company and his work seem to be central to his sense of self. He works hard and seems to enjoy it. He is emotionally committed. He considers himself, and is acknowledged to be, self-directed, capable of "making things happen," and in need of little explicit supervision. He sees the freedom as a source of creativity and opportunity, beneficial both to him and to the company. Income is important, not only in material terms, but also as a symbol of recognition and inclusion. Yet, as Tom's recollection of his burnout episode suggests, there is a darker side to life at Tech, and its signs are never too far from the surface. For Tom it has perhaps receded into the past, now no more than a war story and even a source of pride. Nevertheless, he appears at times wary and watchful, even cynical or ironic about the culture, the company,

and himself. An observer might read into his comments, jokes, and cultural self-consciousness signs of some distancing and considerable ambivalence.

For others, the dark side of the culture looms large. In a similar cubicle not far away, Rick Smith—recently removed from his position—is slowly cleaning out his desk. He stops every now and then to light another cigarette. Mary, his secretary, is in the outer cubicle pretending to be occupied even though the phones have stopped ringing. Like many other familiar and less familiar acquaintances of Rick's, she is behaving as if nothing has happened. He is not sure if he should be grateful for this studied "business as usual" demeanor, but he plays along with it. However, the large, half-filled cartons on the table and the blank screen on his terminal—sure indications of a standstill—belie the signs of routine. Rick would acknowledge that he has burnt out. "I should never have taken this job. Can't quite figure out when things started to go wrong. Bastards just threw me into this damn project. No feedback, no guidance, no support, no warning. 'It's Tech culture,' they say. 'Do What's Right.' Some help! I was so busy with all the details, never had time to get deep enough into the technical stuff. Had to rely on the group members. And they wouldn't communicate. With each other. Or with me. And the schedules were unrealistic in the first place. Probably because of all the politics. When we started to slip, things just fell apart. Everyone was watching. Probably whispering. I found out later that my boss was checking who was logged on at night. They do that. This company's like an aquarium. And my problems at home didn't help. Drinking more and more. What comes first—sipping or slipping? It hit the fan when I told them I was taking two weeks to dry out again—right before the last schedule slip. Luckily the guys in process engineering up in Hanover were willing to take me. The EAP [Employee Assistance Program] advisor here helped—he's a company shrink. Contracted and sworn to secrecy. A real professional. They have a lot of experience with this type of thing. Finally found something for me. Had to do a lot of looking first. Maybe I should take it easy for a while. Or even reconsider this whole damn company! If I can afford to—there should be a warning out front: High Technologies—It's Hazardous to Your Health."

Rick Smith is a casualty. For most who know the company, it is an inevitable part of work there—indeed, of engineering in general. Not everyone, it is conceded, can live in such an environment: some leave, or distance themselves in one way or another from the company's strong demands. Occasionally, like Rick, they succumb. He appears to feel used, betrayed,

manipulated, even oppressed: living in an "aquarium," constantly watched, driven to drink. If one wished to make a case that the culture is a guise for a benign yet invasive tyranny, he would be a prime example. Yet even as he expresses the pain of his situation, he is concerned with finding another job at Tech, plans to stay, expresses a certain gratitude to the company for providing help and tolerating failure, and cannot refrain from making an ironic observation about the company—the hallmark of successful membership. Indeed, he has made his burnout and alcoholism quite public. His personal suffering is an indication—to himself and to others—of the lengths to which he is willing to go in his desire to succeed, to contribute to the company, to adopt the member role. Economic need may account in part for this, but here, too, an observer might find evidence of considerable ambivalence.

When insiders speak of Tech culture, it is often with reference to the everyday life of engineers and managers, to the ups and downs of life in Engineering as experienced by Tom O'Brien and Rick Smith, Dave Carpenter and Ellen Cohen. But there are many others for whom the culture is of equal concern. On the other side of the partition, no more than a few feet away, Rick's secretary Mary Carmanelli is keenly aware of his quiet despair. She has been in the group for two years. She started as a "temp," a temporary worker, who, like the security guard Jim Davis, shares the physical space with residents but enjoys only some of the benefits and obligations of full membership. Subsequently, through good luck and Rick's behind-the-scenes intervention, she became a permanent employee, although here, too, the relevance and applicability of the member role are questionable. "I may not be a manager, but I know what's happening. I saw it coming. Poor guy. Look what they did to him. Burnt him out. Drove him to drink. This place is a zoo. But you can't think too much about him. And he's probably making 50 a year. So big deal. They'll take care of him. . . . Techies. They have it great. Big babies! Wimps! Fifty a year and all the perks and they feel sorry for themselves. I gotta think of myself. That's what they say about the culture: 'Tech takes care of those who take care of themselves.' They said it at the career workshop last week. Rick promised he'd get me into management. Somebody has to fight for you with Personnel. I'm sick of this job. What's gonna happen now that he's gone? Will the new guy fight for me? I really wanna get into management. Marketing, sales, it's all talk. I can do that." She looks at the people wandering by, apparently oblivious to the

turmoil inside. "Well, at least they give him space. They take care of you, whatever happens. That's the culture."

The concerns of Mary and Jim are shared by a large number of people whose affiliation and status are quite different from those of managers and engineers, and who appear to experience the contrast quite clearly. There are unwritten limits to their membership and to the applicability of the culture to their work life. Yet for them too the culture holds out both promise and threat. It offers them a role, it appeals to their underlying sense of self, and it might hold in store the same suffering. Whatever the differences, the question of who they are with regard to the culture and the member role is acute. And here too, ambivalence, albeit of a different sort, appears to characterize work experience.

These glimpses into life at Tech suggest that there is more to "the culture" than unilateral normative control. Managerial ideology and managerial action designed to impose a role on individuals are but one side of the question of control—they are normative demands. As Erving Goffman (1961a) points out, members are never passive objects of control; they are free to react: if conceptions are imposed, they are also systematically dealt with.[28] Members are active participants in the shaping of themselves and of others. They may—at various times—accept, deny, react, reshape, rethink, acquiesce, rebel, conform, and define and redefine the demands and their responses. In other words, they create themselves within the constraints imposed on them. What kinds of creations have we observed at Lyndsville?

None of the people whose privacy we temporarily invaded are easily categorized as accepting or rejecting an imposed role, as subjects of a tyranny or beneficiaries of a benign environment. What they do appear to share is a profound ambivalence about their involvement. They seem aware of the company's demands and their significance. Although they exhibit signs of acceptance, they also indicate considerable wariness and even a degree of cynicism about the company's expectations, even as they are investing their efforts, planning to get ahead, or contemplating the price of failure. They all seem just as much observers as actors. Also, like Dave Carpenter and Ellen Cohen, many are in the potentially confusing situation of being at once agents and subjects of this kind of control. And there are clearly people on the scene on whom the cultural claims are made but whose status seems considerably different—like Mary Carmanelli and Jim Davis.

Thus, the managerial search for normative control sets the stage for a definitional drama played out between the imposed and received images and experiences of appropriate membership. To understand and evaluate normative control, it is necessary to grasp the underlying experiential transaction that lies at its foundation: not only the ideas and actions of managers, but the responses of members. It is with these patterned experiences of membership and with the forces that shape them that this book is concerned.

Conclusion: Studying the Culture of Culture

Tech is heralded in the managerial and business press not only for its technological accomplishments but also for having developed the "strong culture" that makes them possible. The prevailing interpretations of "Tech culture" would seem to suggest that it is an example of the successful use of normative control. The managerial and academic rhetoric would lead us to believe that the company (and others like it) has achieved what has long been a managerial fantasy: the ability to design and impose a member role that includes the thoughts and feelings that underlie work behavior. The company is thought to have accomplished the flowering of normative control without its dysfunctions and is often used as an exemplar and a source of data for those interested in these theoretical and practical issues.

These strong claims raise a number of questions. Does normative control indeed work, and, if so, how? What are the organizational practices associated with it? And, perhaps most crucially, what are the consequences for its subjects? The claims concerning the relationship of culture and control at Tech and similar companies are based on the impressionistic and often partisan views of the companies' supporters or critics and, too often, on managerial assertions. Data on the actual practices that underlie Tech culture, or, most significantly, on the responses of employees, are sparse or nonexistent. Yet answers to these questions are crucial to understanding one of the basic dilemmas of our society: does this form of organization represent an enhancement of freedom or a new and very manipulative form of tyranny?

The brief tour through Lyndsville provides some evidence in support of both views. People appear to work hard; they seem emotionally attached to their work; they live with ambiguity; and some of them experience the excitement of creativity. On the other hand, there are hints of a darker,

less explored side: there seems to be potential for considerable suffering; there is evidence of manipulation and ambivalence; and there are diverse populations affected very differently by "the culture."

Thus, to begin to evaluate strong cultures in the workplace it is necessary to go beyond free-floating rhetoric to the people who live with these cultures and to the everyday lives in the course of which ideas are formed, presented, and put into effect. Culture, in short, must be studied in context and the entire normative transaction examined: managerial conceptions of the culture, their enactment, and the responses of members.

This book is an ethnography of the Engineering Division of High Technologies Corporation. Ethnography is literally the study of culture and, on the face of it, an appropriate method. But the cultural self-consciousness that permeates Tech makes it ethnography with a twist: not just a study of culture as a distant and overarching social scientific concept, but an examination of practical, scientifically informed, self-conscious attempts to design and manage culture. It is an ethnography, as it were, of lay ethnographers, an attempt to document and interpret the culture of culture management.[29]

The strength of ethnography is its concern with detail: ethnographers focus on limited settings, routines, everyday life, and strive to understand "the native point of view"—what their subjects think they are up to. Such an approach tends to shy away from the sweeping generalization, the big statement; but it is also in its power to puncture inflated or overstated ideological points of view, to bring to the surface hidden or obscured meanings, and to offer images, interpretations, and facts that, if nothing else, will allow an informed debate.

Ethnography's strength, however, is also its shortcoming. Ethnography, as Geertz (1973) suggests, coexists uneasily with generalization. The object of ethnographic observation and interpretation, in his view, is neither a controlled experiment nor a microcosm, not "the world in a teacup or . . . the sociological equivalent of a cloud chamber" (p. 23). In short, the inherent skepticism of ethnography extends, as it were, to the power of its own product. Yet the data must be made to speak to larger issues.

This study focuses on a very narrow setting: the engineering division of one large corporation and some of its inhabitants over the course of one year. How typical Tech Engineering is—and, for that matter, what "typical" means—I leave to the reader and to those who might undertake to broaden the ethnographic, or other, perspectives on these matters. But Tech exists,

and its way of life therefore offers both a promise and a threat. It is hoped that this study will contribute a grounded yet skeptical point of view to the debate between those who would have it either way.

In the following chapters I attempt to provide a comprehensive and detailed account of the design, management, and experience of "Tech culture" and its relation to control as it is manifested in the everyday life of the company and its people.

Chapter 2 provides a general overview of the company and its engineering division, its history, employee population, structure, and some of the relevant practices and policies that underlie the engineering of culture.

Chapter 3 describes the substance and form of the managerial ideology of "Tech culture" as it appears in the context of everyday life in Tech's Engineering Division. The analysis focuses on texts produced by or made available to members, and a number of questions are addressed. What images of the company and of the various kinds of members are embedded in the culture? What does Dave Carpenter mean when he speaks of the right "mindset"? What does Ellen Cohen tell the new hires about being a Techie? What does "getting the religion" consist of? In other words, what kind of member role do the culture designers have in mind, and how is it represented?

Chapter 4 describes and analyzes the actual practices through which the culture is brought to life and the ideology made meaningful. The settings and interactions where ideology and experience meet are described. The analysis focuses on the following questions: How is the managerial perspective transmitted? Who are the agents of cultural design? And who are the subjects? Where and how do they interact? How do senior managers like Dave Carpenter go about conveying their point of view? What happens at presentations aimed at creating a "mindset" or "generating enthusiasm"? What is the nature and impact of Ellen Cohen's training efforts—and the efforts of the many others whose work is to "shape culture"? In other words, how does cultural engineering occur in everyday life?

Chapter 5 documents the forms of experience that are shaped under the cultural spotlight and in the shadows of its darker side. How do people construct, maintain, experience, and display a sense of themselves and of others? What do members of various types make of the roles that confront them? What is it like to "ride the wave" or to "burn out"? How does one get "swept away"? How does one "protect oneself"? In short, what kind

of people are created and create themselves in the continuing experiential transactions that underlie normative control?

Chapter 6 provides an overview of the main findings and attempts to analyze their moral implications. What have we learned about the nature of normative control in industrial settings? How are we to evaluate its impact on the lives of people subjected to it and on broader social concerns?

Finally, to balance and perhaps cast a more realistic light on the thread of objective realism that runs through the book, the Appendix offers a personal and very subjective description of the history of the research project, the methods used, and some of the concerns and potential biases—both personal and cultural—that may have influenced the way in which the argument was put together.