HOW EMPLOYEES PERCEIVE THE ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY
OF THE U.S. COAST GUARD

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Communication

by
Karen Love
Summer 2014
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Thesis of Karen Love:

How Employees Perceive the Organizational Identity of the U.S. Coast Guard

[Signatures]

Boyi-Ling Sha, Chair
School of Journalism and Media Studies

David Dozier
School of Journalism and Media Studies

Lisa Kath
Department of Psychology

MAY 14, 2014
Approval Date
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

How Employees Perceive the Organizational Identity of the U.S. Coast Guard
by
Karen Love
Master of Arts in Communication
San Diego State University, 2014

One way for organizations to express their organizational identity is through the dissemination, knowledge, and internalization of the mission statement by its employees. Organizational identity has roots in business communication, organizational psychology, and public relations fields. This thesis explores how the United States Coast Guard uses public relations behaviors to create, maintain, and strengthen its identity. Findings revealed seven distinct organizational mission statements communicated online and in printed publications, when most organizations have one. Despite multiple mission statements, Coast Guard employees responded with knowledge and support of the mission of the organization. Members were satisfied and committed to the organization.

Keywords: Coast Guard, corporate identity, dimensions of public relations, mission statement, organizational identity, public affairs, public relations, organizational public relations, symmetrical communication
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Organizational Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychodynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Identity Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Identity through Mission Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating Mission Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Way Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symmetrical Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Image Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of RQ and Hypotheses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHOD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self as Scholar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Best Mission Statement of the Coast Guard as Perceived by its Employees ..........37
Table 2. Official Mission Statement of the Coast Guard as Perceived by its Employees..................................................................................................................38
Table 3. Two-Way Communication Mean and Reliability.............................................40
Table 4. Symmetrical Communication Mean and Reliability ........................................41
Table 5. Commitment Mean and Reliability................................................................41
Table 6. Satisfaction Mean and Reliability................................................................42
Table 7. Mission Identification Mean and Reliability .................................................42
Table 8. Organizational Belonging Mean and Reliability ............................................43
Table 9. CIM Corporate Identity Management Factor Mean and Reliability..............43
Table 10. Updated Two-Way Communication Mean and Reliability..........................44
Table 11. Updated Satisfaction Mean and Reliability ................................................44
Table 12. This Study Reliability Coefficient Versus Previous Research ......................45
Table 13. Cross-Correlations for Organizational Identity and Public Relations Behaviors ............................................................................................................47
INTRODUCTION

I yelled at the top of my lungs, “Sir/Ma’am, the mission of the United States Coast Guard Academy is to graduate young men and women with sound bodies, stout hearts, and alert minds, with a liking for the sea and its lore, with that high sense of honor, loyalty and obedience which goes with trained initiative and leadership; well grounded in seamanship, the sciences and amenities, and strong in the resolve to be worthy of the traditions of commissioned officers in the United States Coast Guard in the service of their country and humanity!” Thirteen years later, I still have it memorized. When I was a cadet at the Academy, I never had a doubt what my purpose was. That is what mission statements can do. I knew where I was going; I knew what would be required of me over the four years to get there. What about the Coast Guard as an organization and not just the Academy? What is the overarching organizational identity of the Coast Guard? This thesis sets to find out.

Organizational identity has only been studied in three main sectors to include corporate, nonprofit, and higher education (Sha, 2009). The military has not been studied and is one reason for the importance of this thesis research. The military today is an all-volunteer service, and members sign up for a four-year minimum enlistment and can continue on for a maximum of 30 years. I have been fascinated about organizational identity, internal communication, and how employees receive their information for years. As a member of the Coast Guard for thirteen years now, I found it essential to study my organization and provide needed research on these subjects. I have a yearning to understand its members, the organization, and the relationship between the two in order to provide recommendations to improve the Coast Guard as a service.

The Coast Guard is a unique organization. The United States Coast Guard is one of the five armed forces, a military branch, a humanitarian organization, and maritime in nature. With eleven major missions, it is difficult to pinpoint the organizational identity of the 40,000+ person organization. After September 11, 2011, the Coast Guard moved from the Department of Transportation to the Department of Homeland Security. Every member of the Coast Guard is a volunteer, committing his or her service for four to six years.
Coastguardsmen cannot give their 30-day notice, like corporate employees. The nature of the relationship between the organization’s leaders and its members are in flux. Each member gets transferred to a new city and job assignment every two or four years. This is the nature of military service.

Understanding individuals, employees, and military members is important on two primary levels. The first involves the ethical ramifications a company makes affecting the employee on an individual level. Each person brings a unique value system against which they judge organizations. Whether at work, at home, or during recreational times, an individual’s identity tends to remain somewhat constant despite the changing environment.

Secondly, the organization provides a value system as a framework for its employees and leadership to follow. Oft stated in the vision or mission statement, an organization clearly displays the norms of appropriate behavior in the workplace (Spicer, 2013). Organizational mission statements articulate organizational identities and are an optimal way for public relations practitioners to study this construct. Sha (2009) stated “the theoretical relevance of mission statements for public relations may be apparent in one of the richest veins of scholarly research in this field: the concept of symmetrical communication” (p. 299). Therefore, I will review the literature on organizational identity, the dimensions of public relations, and how organizational identity is communicated through mission statements.
LITERATURE REVIEW

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle wrestled with the essence of personal identity, considering the question, “Who is a person?” What is her or his place in the world? Plato’s Republic expressed that each person’s character consists of a true self-encompassing and holistic identity. Conversely, Aristotle suggested that an individual can house multiple and separate identities. Socrates’ philosophy was rooted in the command to “know thyself.”

Identity is woven throughout the history of philosophy, often occupying dense passages from many of the great thinkers of the post-Renaissance period. That tradition of concern with identity is as pronounced in the 21\textsuperscript{th} century as it was in the fifth century B.C. (Gioia, 1998).

“Identity is arguably more fundamental to the conception of humanity than any other notion” (Gioia, 1998, p. 17). Who am I? Is there a more important answer to any question? For organizations, the same question is raised, “Who are we?” In the absence of a construct of ones’ self, a framework by which to define “me,” that “me” can become anything the environment sways it to be. “In the absence of frequent communication of mission, vision, and values, an organization's identity cannot take hold” (Neuwirth, Fairhurst, & Jordan, 1997, p. 245). In the void of an organizational identity, the company will flail aimlessly.

Organizational identity is not the same as individual identity, but it has the same function of rationalizing behavior. Using logic within the constraints of individual identity, a person would say, ‘I am monogamous, therefore I cannot have two wives’ or ‘I am a carnivore, therefore I eat meat.” Bridwell-Mitchell and Mezias (2012) applied this to organizational identity, whereby employees use similar logic like ‘We are a military academy; therefore, it is appropriate to have a code of conduct’ or ‘We are a public relations agency; therefore, it is inappropriate to not communicate with clients.’ The acceptability of attitudes and actions by employees is rationalized and judged against the organizational identity of the corporation.

The origins of modern-day organizational identity have roots in not just organizational behavior (OB) but in psychology (of all types), and in communication.
Seemingly independent of the work being done in OB, social psychologists followed the social identity theory and self-categorization theory and applied it to organizational situations theory (Illia & Lurati, 2006). Meanwhile, scholars in the communication field examined the relation of organizational identity to job satisfaction, socialization, and communication in organizations (e.g., Bridwell-Mitchell & Mezias, 2012; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Kalla, 2005).

In the late 1980s, researchers in organizational behavior, social psychology, and communication re-discovered organizational identity as a unique construct. The resurgence was credited to Ashforth and Mael’s (1989) work using social psychology theories in the field of organizational behavior. Teamed with Albert and Whetten’s (1985) work on identity, the last three decades have seen an influx in all realms of identity research to include organizational identity.

The creation of a strong organizational identity is critical to organizational success. Literature on organizational identity is vast and rich with the common vein of maintaining of a strong organizational identity essential to organizational survival and success (e.g., Gioia, 1998; Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010; Scott & Lane, 2000; Sha, 2009, p. 297). Organizational success is dependent on the employees, their trust in the organization, and loyalty to the goals of the organization. Their commitment and loyalty are summarized in the job satisfaction construct that is one of the most heavily researched areas in communication and organizational psychology (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Commitment and satisfaction will be further discussed below.

Organizational identity has been studied in three primary contexts: corporate, non-profit, and higher education fields. The military has yet to be studied. The military is neither a corporation, a non-profit organization, nor an educational institution. It does not have the goal to sell a product. In the corporate sector, employees identify strongly with their employer, thus investing more time and effort at work. When corporate identities are managed, corporate reputations are heightened, which build stronger relationships with the organization’s stakeholders. One of the most important relationships an organization has is with its employees. “An organization’s most important relationships are those with employees at all levels” (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 213). Therefore, employees’ perception of organizational identity is of utmost importance.
How employees identify themselves in turn influences those internal stakeholder relationships. Organizations emphasize shared beliefs and can be seen as a persuasive strategy to influence internal stakeholders to create common ground. These unified employees sense they belong and are aligned with the organization (Welch & Jackson, 2007). It is necessary to define organizational identity and to articulate the major approaches to organizational identity before going any further into how identity is created through communication.

For this thesis I will use Gioia’s (1998) definition of identity: “Identity is really what makes a person a person. Identity constitutes what is somehow core to my being, what comprises the consistently traceable thread that is ‘me’ over time, and what somehow distinguishes me idiosyncratically from a myriad of other people” (p. 19). It’s very easy to confuse the “who am I” with the “what I do” (for work). Although most people define themselves by their job, the source of employment is no longer the only defining factor.

Albert and Whetten’s (1985) definition is the most pervasive throughout organizational identity literature: “The central, distinctive, and enduring parts of an organization must be perceived as consistent over time by external and internal stakeholders. Organizational identity is formed by a process of ordered inter-organizational comparison and reflections upon them over time” (p. 273). Studies have tried to not only narrow the definition, but also broaden it to include other organizational fields of research. Albert and Whetten (1985) saw each organization as unique, with two conceptual uses. First, the concept of organizational identity “is employed by scientists to define and characterize certain aspects of organizations- the scientific concept of organizational identity; and secondly, it is a concept that organizations use to characterize aspects of themselves” (p. 262). The characterized aspects of themselves coupled with the characterized organization itself are the central themes in this thesis.

Others (e.g., Gioia, 1998) considered organizational identity as a common understanding of mission, values, and goals that are the foundation of the organization and not necessarily explicitly stated by the leadership. The common understanding shifts over time based on external influences. An individual’s identity appears stable over time. A person’s core values, personality and perceptions are constant over time. Gioia (1998) stated,
“Organizations seem to operate similarly, but with a twist” that organizational identity fluctuates more than a person’s individual identity (p. 22).

Even before Albert and Whetten (1985), multiple researchers attempted to redefine the identity concept hinging on the shared characteristics of the organization’s members. Countering that argument, Ashforth and Mael (1989) argued that organizational identity as a construct “is not necessarily associated with any specific behaviors or affective states” (p. 21). All the aforementioned definitions imply that the “organizational member has linked his or her organizational membership to his or her self-concept, either cognitively (e.g., feeling a part of the organization; internalizing organizational values), emotionally (pride in membership), or both” (Riketta, 2005, p. 361).

Since definitions of organizational identity are dynamic and varied, I will simplify the process for this thesis. Organizational identity means more than employees’ conceptions of the organization’s central, distinctive and enduring characteristics (see Albert & Whetten, 1985) as it can change over time. Bridwell-Mitchell and Mezias’ (2012) definition asserted that organizational identity answers the question “who are we, as an organization” (p. 191) by providing members with a system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions that determine appropriate organizational activities.

Approaches to Organizational Identity

Three major approaches are prevalent in the study of organizational identity theory: functional, interpretive and post-modern. Albert and Whetten (1985), Boros (2009), Gioia (1998), among others, are in this camp of three major approaches thinking. He and Brown (2013) recently introduced a fourth approach of psychodynamic to the mix; they also renamed the interpretive approach ‘social constructionist’. The following sections of this thesis explicate each approach to organizational identity: functional, interpretive, psychodynamic and postmodern.

FUNCTIONAL

The functionalist is the most researched and well-known paradigm. The functionalism approach assumes identity is a social fact. As a variable, it can be “operationalized, measured, manipulated, put and tested in relations to other variables” (Boros, 2009, p. 648).
Functionalism identities are objective, essential, and have physical elements. With roots in natural science, this approach is concretely described with associated laws. Conceptualization of organizational identity has been a current research focus in organizational behavior, communication, and marketing (e.g., Boros, 2009; Gioia, 1998; Gioia et al., 2010; He & Brown, 2013; Whetten, 2006).

Gioia (1998) associated the functionalism approach to its popularity due to “its ontological assumptions: that it is relatively stable and easily comparable” (p. 26). Researches rely on the testability of the constructs for this approach. In order to be compared longitudinally, its constructs have been standardized across industry, and organizations. Using this approach, organizational identity can be characterized, measured against other dimensions, and used to predict actions (Boros, 2009; He & Brown, 2013).

Even with the research-related advantages of this approach, He and Brown (2013) found the mainstream functionalist way of studying organizational identity problematic. Functionalist research, they claimed, marginalizes complicated actions into trite ideas, often relies on stereotypical views of employees, is inconsiderate to outlier opinions, and “ignores the relations of power in which identity statements are made, championed, forgotten and contested” (He & Brown, 2013, p. 7. Contrary to functionalism’s objectivity, interpretivism is inherently subjective.

**INTERPRETIVE**

Originally called the interpretive perspective (see Albert & Whetten, 1985; Boros, 2009; Gioia, 1998; Gioia et al., 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1985), some researchers redefined the approach as the social constructionist or social actor perspective (see He & Brown, 2013; Whetten, 2006). As the name implies, each person can witness then interpret the same thing differently. Each person is an actor and can see variation from their perspective. Interpretivism traces its roots to the hermeneutic tradition. Hermeneutics emphasizes the necessity to know the context of an event, paradigm, in order to properly define and describe it.

The subjectivity is what has drawn researchers to further develop this paradigm. Interpretivists intend to understand the meaning of the organization through the eyes of the insiders, the employees. “They revel in getting as close as possible to the action, often
teetering on the edge of ‘going native’” (Gioia, 1998, p. 27) and attempting to understand and absorb the viewpoints of the organization’s members.

The interpretivism approach to organizational identity is the socially constructed product of “relationships between collectively held, and socially structured individual cognitions regarding ‘who the organization is’” (He & Brown, 2013 p. 8). The interpretivism approach seeks to understand how an organization develops a collective understanding of “who we are as an organization?” (Gioia et al., 2010).

Interpretivism/social construction as a paradigm is less clearly defined and more ambiguous than functionalist perspectives maintain (He & Brown, 2013). Notably, this view essentially emphasizes the process that employees go through to establish their own social construction of the organization’s identity. Gioia et al. (2010) found that meaning is subjective, and members negotiate the meaning not only against their own identity, but also in relation to other organizational members.

**Psychodynamic**

The third perspective and least studied is the psychodynamic approach. Driver (2009) has articulated a rather different understanding of organizational identity called psychodynamic which emphasized its “imaginary” character. This imaginary character draws attention to the otherwise underestimated unconscious that a person uses to shape his/her individual identity without even knowing the process occurred. In He and Brown’s (2013) version of the paradigm, they attested that this approach is impossible to collect data on, as actual identities are unknowable, and called it a fantasy to think defining an organization’s identity is in the realm of feasible.

**Postmodern**

The fourth major approach to organizational identity is postmodernism. Not only is identity imaginary, like the psychodynamic approach hailed, but subjective and reliant on the assumption of indeterminacy (Boros, 2009). At the core of postmodernism is the blatant passing of judgment on most ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. This postmodern approach questions all beliefs and research, including their own beliefs and assumed truths. Instead of integration toward a common belief or framework, or even
major approaches to organizational identity, postmodernists prefer divergence and diversity rather than simplicity and order.

As Albert and Whetten (1985) described, dual or multiple identities are possible individually or within an organization. The postmodern approach revels in these often multiple contradictory identities and thrives in negotiation techniques. In postmodernism, no idea can supercede another, so with multiple identities, they all must have equal weight and none central to the core. Gioia (1998) claimed, “Postmodernism is problematic, even threatening, for many scholars because of its project to abolish individual identity” (p. 29). He continued that when identity can be anything, it becomes mythological in nature and impossible to study. He and Brown (2013) noted that postmodernism can result in fracturing of organizational identities, instead of unification. It no longer has a core, but only mirrors the current time.

This thesis will take the functionalist approach to organizational identity. No other approach operationalizes identity as a construct to be researched. The concreteness of a definition in this area can be daunting, but necessary to more inductively study identity. Organizational identity must be defined in order for employees and management to know whether they ascribe and align to the tenets of the organization. In consideration of Ashforth and Mael’s (1989) definition of organizational identification, a member must be able to define themselves with reference to the organization. Therefore, a concept like organizational identity must be able to be defined in order to create a frame of reference.

**Social Identity Theory**

As organizational identity was growing roots in organizational behavior, communication, and psychology theory, a number of social psychologists moved toward applying the social identity foundation to organizations. A new field of organizational identity was formed from social identity and self-categorization theory (Riketta, 2005).

Birthed at the Bristol School of Social Psychologists, social identity theory entered the world to help answer the question Who Am I? Turner was Tajfel’s student and together they developed the social identity theory. As the fathers of this theory, they defined social identity theory as the “individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership”
(Tajfel, 1972 as cited in Tajfel, 2010, p. 31). They argued that people identify themselves with particular groups to gain the attributes associated with the organization, team, or ingroup. The self-enhancement with the ingroup needs the comparison to the perceived-as-less-favorable outgroups. An individual does not simply choose one social identification, but multiple, and the sum total is one’s social identity (Tajfel, 2010, p. 18).

Ashforth and Mael (1989) theorized that organizational identification is a specific form of social identification. Social identification is the noun used by people to define themselves as well as others. When people are in a social category it is considered ingroup. When people look from the outside in, it is the outgroup. According to social identity theory, people define themselves in terms of significant group memberships.

All identity is relational—individual identity, social, and organizational. The identity of individuals consists of (a) a personal identity, or individual characteristics such as gender; (b) a social identity, or membership in a social category such as the family or the organization where the individual is employed; (c) a relational identity, or role characteristics that define the function one has, such as daughter or scientist (Brewer, 2003). Social identity theory tells us that people tend to fixate on their distinctiveness, to emphasize their uniqueness against others. Group identity is maintained by intergroup comparisons: ingroup versus outgroup (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Illia & Lurati, 2006).

**Organizational Identification**

With respect to social identity theory, people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories, such as organizational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age cohort (Ravasi & van Rekom, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). A social categorization of identity is critical because innate in its psychological approval is the approval from others of the values and behavioral norms of the ingroup (Scott & Lane, 2000). Ashforth and Mael (1989) went further to say that internalization of the ingroup’s values and mission is necessary for the identification. They continued, “identification is the perception of oneness with or belongingness to a group, involving direct or vicarious experience of its successes and failures” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 34). Identification is the sum of identities that an individual holds. Thus, organizational identification is the sum of perceived oneness with the organization. An employee’s “degree of oneness” with his or her
respective organization was found to have a positive relationship with job satisfaction and attrition, as well as extra-role and in-role performance (Ruck & Welch, 2012, p. 295).

Understanding an employee’s social identity is vital to organizational leadership in articulating where the organization fits in with the rest of the employee’s social identity. Being on the payroll is not enough for some people to feel that sense of inclusion in the employing organization. Other events and activities, such as social gatherings and team projects, spur their ingroup status (Scott & Lane, 2000). This perception of inclusion and oneness varies by individual, and that is what social identity theory seeks to determine (Ravasi & van Rekom, 2003). Bridwell-Mitchell and Mezias (2012) noted that social identity increase identification by leveraging employee’s motivation to be part of the desirable social ingroup.

Researchers suggested that social identity theory can rebuild some consistency to organizational identification, and the theory can suggest fruitful applications to other fields including organizational behavior, psychology, and communication (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Scott & Lane, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Social identity theory has been widely applied to explain employee–organization relationships (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ruck & Welch, 2012; Scott & Lane, 2000; Sha, 2009; Simões, Dibb, & Fisk, 2005). Identification enables an employee to evaluate the organization, garner loyalty and commit to the organization’s values and beliefs (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 35).

Internalization of the organization’s values and mission is necessary for identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Employees need to feel like they belong to the ingroup of the company, and identify themselves with the company’s mission. Sha (2009) divided organizational identification into two constructs (a) a sense of organizational belonging and (b) identification with the organization’s mission based on Ashforth and Mael’s (1989) definition (p. 303).

**Organizational Belonging**

When members sense they belong to the organization, the result is a positive social identity (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Therefore, employers emphasize shared beliefs and values which meet individual needs for belonging. Organizational belonging is increased through strategic communication between managers and internal stakeholders. Managers “promote
commitment to the organization, a sense of belonging, and awareness of its changing environment, and understanding of its evolving aims” (Ruck & Welch, 2012, p. 296).

Mission Identification

Understanding the organization’s evolving aims and mission is indicative of mission identification, the second dimension of the organizational identity construct. How and to what extent do employees identify themselves as part of the organization? Decramer, Desmidt, and Prinzie (2011) observed that this attitudinal focus denoted that the perceived level of ‘mission statement acceptance’ could be an antecedent to mission statement performance (p. 475). Some scholars use the mission statement as a guideline to measure identification (Decramer et al., 2011; Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997; Neuwirth et al., 1997; Sha, 2009). The mission statement is a corporate guideline that encourages identification because it is “rhetorically designed in order to ensure maximum employee ‘buy-in’” (Swales & Rogers, 1995, p. 223). An in-depth look at organizational identity, employee’s perception of mission identification through mission statements will be examined next.

Organizational Identity through Mission Statements

In charting their direction, organizations communicate their corporate values and identity through their mission statements to create a sense of commonality and purpose (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Decramer et al., 2011; Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997; Neuwirth et al., 1997; Sha, 2009; Simões et al., 2005; Spicer, 2013). Stemming from social identity theory, identity can be reflected in the organizational mission that is shared among the employees (Sha, 2009; Simões et al., 2005). An organization’s mission statement provides the foundation for its identity.

Individuals bring their own value systems to the organizations in which they work, play, or volunteer. These individuals are the employees of the company and need a mission for purposes of their own self-definition, as well as “organizational goal attainment” (Scott & Lane, 2000, p. 45). Yet, it can be a struggle for organizational managers to put these goals into articulate words. Mission statements explicitly state the values and cultures of the organizations that are enduring, despite external factors that may arise (Sha, 2009).
In the military world, the term “mission,” among other terms, is sometimes confused with an operation or tasking. In the academic world, “mission” and “mission statement” are used synonymously. When left uncapitalized, the word “mission” is the organization’s purpose (Neuwirth et al., 1997). The vision is the hoped for future direction of the company, and values are principles that the company respects and holds their employees to (Gioia et al., 2010; Spicer, 2013). Neuwirth et al. (1997) argued that the “mission statement is the most frequently used term to refer to the broad category of philosophy statements that subsumes some combination of vision, mission, and values” (p. 260).

Mission statements put into writing an organization’s core competencies and distinct abilities, articulate the corporate goals, and provide a value-laden structure to daily decisions (Sha, 2009). According to Swales and Rogers (1995), mission statements are a framework of the corporation’s pronounced belief system and ideology highlighting its values, positive behaviors, and guiding principles (p. 227). Broom and Sha (2013) claimed “the mission statement helps employees set priorities and goals, so that all members of the organization are committed to achieving the mission specified in the statement” (p. 222). I will use Broom and Sha’s definition as it is the most clear and does not lump together vision, mission, and values in the definition like Neuwirth et al. (1997) do above.

Organizations need mission statements. Miles (1980) defined an organization as a “coalition of interest groups, sharing a common resource base, paying homage to a common mission, and depending upon a larger context for its legitimacy and development” (p. 5). An employee cannot put his or her own interests ahead of the common mission of the organization. To get employees aligned with the organizational goals, internal communication is necessary. Tkalac Verčič, Verčič, and Sriramesh (2012) noted that this internal communication process starts with the vision, extends to the mission statement, and eventually that strategy is executed outside the bounds of the organization to external stakeholders. Using the mission statement framework, employees are empowered to distribute the identity of the organization that is more than likely shared by its employees than any other stakeholder.

After reviewing the literature dealing with mission statements, I found three main themes: (a) defining mission statements (see Bridwell-Mitchell & Mezias, 2012; Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997; Men, 2012; Neuwirth et al., 1997; Simões et al., 2005; Williams, 2008); (b)
organizational identity through mission statements (see Decramer et al., 2011; Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997; Sha, 2009); and (c) how to write them with examples (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997; Simões et al., 2005; Swales & Rogers, 1995; Williams, 2008). In public relations, Sha (2009) found that scholars have used mission statements to research activists’ use of media relations, their effectiveness (see Williams, 2008), and perceptions and knowledge of those particular organizations’ mission statements.

Mission statements have been deemed important in defining who the organization is and where it is going. Organizations create mission statements for a variety of reasons, “to shape culture” (Neuwirth et al., 1997, p. 260), to inform employees about the company’s goals and create unity (Men, 2012; Simões et al., 2005; Swales & Rogers, 1995), and to serve as an “effective public relations tool” (Sha, 2009; Williams, 2008, p. 98).

Communicating with one voice to both internal and external stakeholders is essential to effective public relations. “The existence of an organizational mission statement gives purpose to the public relations function” (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 313). It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the mission statement to public relations. Dozier (1995) reasoned that “the purpose and direction of an organization (its mission) is affected by relationships with key constituents (publics) in the organization’s environment” (p. 85). Within that outlook, Dozier continued to emphasize the importance of communicating the goals of the organization to its key publics. The articulation of the organizational mission statement “gives the public relations function a framework within which to operate,” ergo, the existence of an organizational mission statement gives needed structure to public relations activities (Sha, 2009, p. 299). Communicating the mission statement is a function of the public relations practitioner (Neuwirth et al., 1997).

**Communicating Mission Statements**

To reveal an organization’s philosophy to key internal and external publics, many corporations place the mission statement in their annual reports (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997). Neuwirth et al. (1997) noted that it is also important to move beyond the formal communication of annual reports, and the mission statement should be weaved through everyday business activities. Mission statements should be seen in company newsletters, social media, speeches, Internet homepages, advertising, business cards, marketing tools, as
well as annual reports. Mission statements are often more found on corporate websites now (Williams, 2008) than are print annual reports (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997).

As noted above regarding internal communication, both academics and practitioners emphasize the role of clear, consistent, and continuous communication with stakeholders (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Conveying the mission statement is no different. Organizational mission statements need to be communicated clearly, consistently, and comprehensively. Clear articulation of the company’s mission and philosophy facilitates the sharing of organizational values and norms by all stakeholders (Simões et al., 2005). When communication is muddled, both the organization and its employees can aimlessly flounder (Neuwirth et al., 1997). Succinctly explicated mission statements provide the foundation to organizational identity that may be critical to organizational survival and success (Sha, 2009). The mission statement is often seen as the starting point for a corporate identity program.

Consistently communicating the mission statement helps ingrain the mission in the mind of the stakeholders. “Infrequent communication has several negative consequences, especially for internal audiences” (Neuwirth et al., 1997, p. 245). Employees who do not see or hear the mission statement routinely fail to see its benefit and consider it nothing more than a formality. Forces of the environment then take over without the spine of the mission statement or a strong organizational identity to guide employees. Members should be able to lean on the mission statement when chaos in the business environment ensues. Consistency in the organization’s literature to include mission statements results in stronger internal consensus among employees; greater internalization of corporate values (Simões et al., 2005) and an the organization’s increased performance (Decramer et al., 2011, p. 478). Consensus is impossible when goals are fuzzy, boundaries blurry, and purpose vague.

Using first-person-plural pronouns encourages employees to identify with the corporation (Williams, 2008). When employees use the word “we” when talking about the organization, it is a sign that the member has subscribed to the organizational identity of the company, ascribed the company’s attributes to oneself, and sensed they belong. Mission statements are best when developed to encourage inclusion, and support the common cause. As noted above (see Ashforth & Mael, 1992), studies of social identity often measured the frequency with which members use the word ‘we’ when referring to their employer. Social
identity allegiances increase the individual’s identification when employees are motivated to be part of the desired social group (Bridwell-Mitchell, & Mezias, 2012). Employees want to define for themselves who and what they are inside and outside the organization. Scott and Lane (2000) found that stakeholders identify with the organization when they “perceive an overlap between their self-identity and the cognitive image they construct of an organization” (p. 49).

Understanding what organizational identity is, the public relations theory of symmetrical internal communication, and that organizational identity is communicated through mission statements are the goals of this thesis. Excellent organizations behave symmetrically and adapt to environmental conditions and pressures, while concurrently adhering to core values, identity, and mission. Mission statements express an organization’s identity in writing and showcase the character of the organization. Therefore, the study of these mission statements and symmetrical communication is appropriate for public relations research and may be “one of the richest veins of scholarly research in this field” (Sha, 2009, p. 299).

Sha (2009) is the only scholar published to date to tap this rich vein. She conducted an online search using the index Communication and Mass Media Complete=EBSCOhost with the key terms “organizational mission” and “public relations” and found only a single article on September 5, 2007 (Sha, 2009). On February 3, 2014, I conducted the search again; turning up three articles. Then using the same search requirements with the key terms “public relations” and “Coast Guard,” the results were nil. That is why this thesis research is so important to both the Coast Guard and public relations research.

Because mission statements reflect organizational identity, because effective communication with employees makes more effective organizations, because the Coast Guard has never been studied in this regard, and because organizational identity often is articulated by an organization’s public relations behaviors, this study sought answers to the following research question:

RQ1: How do Coast Guard employees perceive the Coast Guard’s organizational identity?
Organizational identity is created through internal communication, which is a part of the public relations function (see Broom & Sha, 2013). Internal communication affects the degree of identification employees feel with their organization and their attitude toward supporting (or opposing) the organization. This section will flow through two way communication, symmetrical communication, employee satisfaction, and employee commitment. An employee might perceive him- or herself as a team player in the company (self-categorization) and when that company is highly respected, employee self-enhancement increases. This oneness, inclusion, and belonging create a positive social identity for the employee (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

In this thesis, I will look at communication through the public relations lens. How is organizational identity created through internal communication? Internal communication is one of the seven facets of organizational communication. In addition to internal communication, public affairs, public relations, investor relations, environmental communication, recruitment, and corporate advertising round out the seven (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Broom and Sha (2013) asserted, “internal publics—are any organization’s most important public” (p. 212). An organization’s greatest resource and public is its employees, who are thus worthy of being researched.

As defined by the public relations “bible,” Cutlip and Center’s ‘Effective Public Relations’, “public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 26). J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) offered an even simpler definition: “the management of communication between the organization and its publics” (p. 6). Hazleton and Long (1988) defined public relations as a “communication function of management through which organizations adapt to, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organizational goals” (p. 81). Later, J. E. Grunig (1992) would define public relations as building relationships with publics that either confine or help the organization to meet its mission. Dozier (1995) recommended that [public relations] communication is “a strategic management function (that helps) manage relationships with key publics that affect organizational mission, goals and objectives” (p. 85).
In 2013, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) crowd-sourced the definition of public relations and settled on, “public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics”. The similarities are striking between PRSA and Cutlip and Center. Since Cutlip and Center’s introductory definition in 1952, the profession’s ultimate goal has remained stable. Cutlip and Center’s (1952) widely accepted definition will be used for this thesis.

Frequent communication is the responsibility of the communication and public relations department. Public relations is concerned with the communication between the organization and its stakeholders (or publics). Within the organization, all departments must be integrated and coordinated to efficiently distribute necessary information. Starting from the founder’s vision, producing policy and procedure, creating a mission statement, and implementing strategy, the public relations department must relay this information to all stakeholders (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2012). Uniting human resources, marketing, communications, it is the role of the public relations department to integrate consistent messaging to all organizational audiences, including internally to its employees.

**Internal Communication**

How do employees know in what direction the organization is going? An organization’s direction is predominantly led by its identity. For all members of the company to be knowledgeable about the organization’s identity, it must be clearly stated, and subsequently communicated to its stakeholders. Stakeholders are “people in interdependent relationships with an organization, meaning that what they know, feel, and do has an impact on the organization and vice versa” (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 270). Employees are internal stakeholders and every organizational decision affects what they know, how they feel, and what they do.

Within any organization, communication is always occurring. Internal communication is a mixture of human resources, public relations, communication, and marketing (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2012). Nomenclature is not consistent. Internal communication has been referred to as internal relations (see Broom & Sha, 2013), corporate communication, employee engagement (see Ruck & Welch, 2012), and even internal marketing (mostly when the public relations function is within the marketing department).
E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) used all four interchangeably (excluding internal marketing). Broom and Sha (2013) refer to internal relations and employee communication as two separate functions. The term internal communication is the most widely used (J. E. Grunig, 1992; Tkalac Verčič et al., 2012) and will be the terminology used throughout this thesis.

Internal communication is one of seven functions of public relations, alongside public affairs, marketing communication, investor relations, community relations, media relations, and government relations (Broom & Sha, 2013; Gillis, 2006; Welch & Jackson, 2007). Members of each of these groups receive their information about the organization through different channels, and their information may vary. Internal stakeholders may not be privy to managerial information, and more influenced by what is projected to them from outside the organization. Bridwell-Mitchell and Mezias (2012) found that the organization’s desired image may conflict with the employee’s reality when exposed to opposing information.

Cutlip and Center’s definition of internal relations is strikingly similar to their public relations definition: “The goal of internal relations [communication] is to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the employees on whom its success or failure depends” (as cited in Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 214). In reality, employees are engaged in mutually dependent relationships with organizations (Scott & Lane, 2000). Tkalac Verčič et al. (2012) broadly and simply defined internal communication as “all forms of communication within the organization” (p. 225). Welch and Jackson (2007) sought to define and redefine the term, concluding that internal communication is “between an organization’s strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organization, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims” (p. 186).

**Two-Way Communication**

There are six dimensions of public relations behavior, i.e., two-way communication, symmetrical communication, ethical communication, interpersonal communication, mediated communication, and social activities (Sha, 2009, p. 307). This thesis will focus on the dimensions of two-way communication and symmetrical communication. As the name implies, two-way communication takes place between the organization and its stakeholders, and the flow of information goes in both directions. This dialogue may be used to help
change attitudes and behaviors of the stakeholders with the organization (Roper, 2005). In this behavior, companies listen to their stakeholders’ concerns, tailored their communication plans accordingly, but may not alter the organization’s own behavior correspondingly. The goal for the organization may be for the publics to alter their opinion and behaviors to correspond to the organization’s views. J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) found that many public relations practitioners use the term feedback as a synonym for two-way communication.

This two-way form of communication may be designed to persuade or control employee behaviors in ways that management wants. Men (2012) concluded that organizations may offer input into the decision making process, but these opinions do not necessarily materialize into organizational change. Organizations listen to their stakeholders but use the information thus obtained to tailor their communication to “allay the concerns of stakeholders, but do not make a corresponding alteration to their behavior” (Roper, 2005, p. 69). Therefore I propose:

H1: Two-way communication is positively related to mission identification.
H2: Two-way communication is positively related to organizational belonging.

Symmetrical Communication

Under the umbrella of two-way communication is symmetrical communication, a subset of two-way communication. Welch and Jackson’s internal communication definition emphasizes the relationship between the organization and its employees, only created through ethical and symmetrical communication. Symmetrical communication is important to successful internal communication (Broom & Sha, 2013; Dozier, 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002; Men, 2012; Ruck & Welch, 2012; Sha, 2009; Welch & Jackson, 2007). L. A. Grunig et al. (2002) explained that “[i]nternal mediated communication can be considered symmetrical if its content meets the employees’ need to know rather than the management’s need to tell” (p. 487). The goal of symmetrical internal communication is, by nature, two-way with the intent to create dialogue between the organization and its employees (Men, 2012; Welch & Jackson, 2007). Building mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders helps create excellent organizations.

Public relations scholars have spent the last 35 years defining, redefining, and explicating the theory of symmetrical communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In the years of
researching this model of communication, it has been deemed the model for excellent and ethical public relations (Roper, 2005). When public relations professionals in organizations practice symmetrical communication, the culture is more participative, job satisfaction among employees is increased, and organizations are made more effective by “building open, trusting, and credible relationships” (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002, p. 513). In the Excellence study, J. E. Grunig (1992) noted that these participating employees are also likely to be effective symmetrical communicators with members of external publics (p. 534).

The creation and maintenance of symmetrical public relationships requires multiple inputs from external publics (Hon & Grunig, 1999), and that participation creates the culture of inclusion with the goal of balancing the organization’s interest with the interests of others (Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009). All parties in the symmetrical model benefit from this approach to public relations. Searching for common ground, open dialogue, and willingness to change is the basis for long-term, effective relationships. A win-win solution benefits both the organization and its stakeholders.

Symmetrical communication is about an organization’s willingness to change itself, inasmuch as it strives to change its stakeholders (Sha, 2009, p. 300). Hon and Grunig (1999) theorized that, the “most productive relationships in the long run are those that benefit both parties in the relationship rather that those designed to benefit the organization only” (p. 11). The emphasis that Hon and Grunig place on relationships cannot be overlooked. Symmetrical communication requires a relationship, an ongoing process, and not a one-time event.

When organizations practice symmetrical internal communication, employees’ satisfaction in their job and in the organization increases (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002). Additionally, “satisfied employees are likely to be more loyal to the organization and to identify with it” (p. 481).

Employees who are empowered to participate in decision making and to engage in symmetrical internal communication are likely also to be effective symmetrical communicators with members of external publics as well as internal (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002, p. 534). These empowered employees establish a relationship with the organization based on trust and commitment and are satisfied. Good relationships with employees increase the likelihood that they will be satisfied and committed (Hon & Grunig, 1999) and build positive relationships with the organization’s external publics (Men, 2012).
So far the focus of internal communication has been on processes, not message content or employee needs that lead to organizational identification and commitment (Ruck & Welch, 2012, p. 295). The researchers argued that current research underplays the importance of organizational identification and instead is skewed toward individual satisfaction. Employees can be an organization’s best (or worst) ambassadors, depending on whether and how they get information. “Research into employee preferences for channel and content of internal corporate communication is required to ensure it meets employees’ needs” (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 187). But this research is not being conducted (Ruck & Welch, 2012).

Much of the current literature includes uses and preferences of communication medium and not whether it is effective and meets the employee’s needs. What channels do employees prefer, now that most corporate newsletters are out of print? (Company newsletters were the previous primary source of organizational information prior to the mid-2000s.) Integrating the communication process for all stakeholders minimizes the likelihood of contradictory messages (Simões et al., 2005) and maximizes speaking with one voice.

Quality employee relationships help achieve organizational goals in addition to building and protecting the good reputation and image of the company (Men, 2012, p. 30). As noted earlier, “[a]n organization’s most important relationships are those with employees at all levels” (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 213). Symmetrical internal communication improves the character of the company through effective communication and dialogue. When employees internalize the brand and the company mission, they are corporate ambassadors, and a company-wide public relations force is formed (Men, 2012). Every employee is an ambassador and spokesperson for the organization for which they work (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

“Symmetrical communication lies at the heart of the oft-cited models of public relations” (Sha, 2009, p. 299). Many scholars see this symmetry as the most important concept in public relations (Dozier, 1995; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002; Hazleton & Long, 1988; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Ledingham, 2003; Men, 2012; Roper, 2005; Sha, 2009; Welch & Jackson, 2007). Symmetry only occurs when both organizations and publics are willing to change. The Excellence Study showed that symmetry is a determining factor on whether an organization succeeds or fails (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002). I propose that when an organization
communicates symmetrically, they are also involved in two-way communication, have increased mission identification, and organizational belonging.

H3: Symmetrical communication is positively related to two-way communication.
H4: Symmetrical communication is positively related to mission identification.
H5: Symmetrical communication is positively related to organizational belonging.

**Employee Commitment**

Organizational public relations (OPR) is dependent on symmetrical public relations. How do public relations practitioners create and maintain these relationships with their stakeholders? Studying the relational approach of public relations dominates much of current research in the field. Ledingham (2003) defined the perspective of relationship management as balancing the interests of the organization with those of the publics through managing organization-public relationships (p. 181). Relationships benefit both parties the organization and its associated public; each have expectations of each other, thus why the relationships must be managed.

Instead of purely relaying information to the public, Ferguson (1984) was the first to suggest that public relations should center on the relationships between the organization and its publics. Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997) attempted to explicate organizational public relations; however, they could not come to a conclusion based on the research. They (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000) did, however, define it three years later:

Organization-public relationships are represented by the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics. These relationships have properties that are distinct from the identities, attributes, and perceptions of the individuals and social collectivities in the relationships. Though dynamic in nature, relationships can be described at a single point in time and tracked over time. (p. 18)

The patterns of interaction and interdependence between the organization and its publics showcased what Ledingham and Bruning (1998) clarified as impacting the “economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity” (p. 62). Mutual dependence, as it seems through the relational approach, is at the heart of organizational-public relationships. Huang (1998) defined OPR as “the degree that the organization and its publics trust one another, agree on one has rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to one another” (p. 12). This definition led
to the creation of (and extensively revered and studied [i.e., J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998]) four indicators for organization-public relationships: trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and commitment (Huang, 2001, p. 64).

Men (2012) articulated why employees are more willing to engage and participate in the organization “[w]hen employees trust the organization, feel satisfied, committed, and agree on mutual control, they feel empowered” (p. 50). In their Gold Standard paper for the Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation, Hon and Grunig (1999) defined each of the OPR constructs and created measurement items for them.

Commitment is defined as “[t]he extent to which each party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote. Two dimensions of commitment are continuance commitment, which refers to a certain line of action, and affective commitment, which is an emotional orientation” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 3). The aim of these and other relationship strategies is mutual benefit between organization and stakeholders. Neuwirth et al. (1997) noted that satisfaction in management and commitment to the organization is most likely to influence a person’s information environment, and thus perception of a reciprocal relationship.

Welch and Jackson (2007) brought the importance of effective organizational-public relations to light. They theorized that low levels of trust are associated with poor communication (in quantity or quality). They found trust to be a precursor to commitment. If stakeholders do not understand the organization’s direction, those same stakeholders cannot be committed to the organization to which they previously had a stake. When stakeholders lack commitment, particularly internal stakeholders, they can be reluctant to trust the organization and be unsatisfied with their employment situation. When stakeholders are committed to and satisfied with the organization, they will, in turn, communicate the organization’s goals (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Thus, I propose:

H6: Two-way communication is positively related to employee commitment.

H7: Symmetrical communication is positively related to positive employee commitment.

H8: Employee commitment is positively related to mission identification.

H9: Employee commitment is positively related to organizational belonging.
Employee Satisfaction

Satisfaction is “the extent to which each party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced. A satisfying relationship is one in which the benefits outweigh the costs” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 3). Studies have shown that employees are most satisfied with information that helps them make sense of their situation by explaining how their jobs fit into the organizational mission (J. E. Grunig, 1992).

Relationships flourish when all four of these dimensions work in tandem. Ledingham and Bruning (1998, p. 58) acknowledged the necessity of these OPR indicators to the field of public relations: (1) there exists a balance in the relationship, (2) both parties in the relationship feel that the other is investing of time and themselves, (3) both parties are willing to make a commitment to the relationship, and (4) both parties can be trusted to act in a manner that supports the relationship. The relationships between the organization and its publics must be nourished in a supportive environment in which both the stakeholders and organization can function to achieve their goals (Hazleton & Long, 1988). Thus, I propose:

H10: Two-way communication is positively related to employee satisfaction.
H11: Symmetrical communication is positively related to positive employee satisfaction.
H12: Employee satisfaction is positively related to employee commitment.
H13: Employee satisfaction is positively related to mission identification.
H14: Employee satisfaction is positively related to organizational belonging.

Corporate Image Management

In addition to organizational belonging and mission identification, organizational identity can also be measured by how the company manages its image. Corporate Image Management is grounded in social identity theory, which posits that employee’s identification with the organization is a form of social identification. Identity can be reflected in the organizational climate and mission and in the values and beliefs shared among the firm’s members. Consistency and coherence of the organization’s character result in greater internalization and stronger internal consensus (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The organization’s character is its identity and internal consensus refers to its employees.
To more robustly measure the organizational identity construct, I incorporated the Corporate Image Management (CIM) scale of Simões et al. (2005) into the study. Simões et al., (2005) looked into how internal stakeholders manage corporate identity. The researchers supposed that corporate identity is the ideal self-image that an organization projects to its stakeholders. What does the company communicate about itself? Does that image, in turn, mirror how the organization wants to be perceived? Does the Coast Guard manage their corporate identity well?

Organizational identity is developed and maintained by the organization’s management. Management plays a key role in the development and maintenance of corporate identity, including paying particular attention to the internal and controllable aspects of the process. Corporate identity encapsulates how the company views itself and, through it’s positioning, how it wants others to perceive it. CIM includes three perspectives: mission and values dissemination (MVD), consistent image implementation (CII), and visual identity implementation (VII) (Simões et al., 2005, p. 153).

The three above perspectives feed into the CIM construct. The first dimension of CIM is Mission and Values Dissemination (MVD). Its philosophy, mission, and values are strategic in perspective, which is consistent with the literature that emphasizes the importance of strategy in the development of corporate identification (Simões et al., 2005, p. 163). Corporate identity is strategically driven by each organization’s unique corporate philosophy, which is reflected in its mission, values, and goals. This dimension diffuses the philosophy of the company internally and creates a sense of purpose among the employees.

The consistent image implementation (CII) perspective takes into account the physical look of the facilities of the corporation, the visual branding, and use of marketing materials. The Coast Guard has common verbiage learned at Boot Camp, and reinforced at subsequent duty stations. This communication aspect of image implementation also does not apply to the study.

The third CIM perspective, visual identity implementation (VII), pertains to the management of corporate symbols, logos, typefaces, rites of passage, and other visual aspects. The Coast Guard manages its visual identity well through the members wearing uniforms, grooming standards, the paint of its ships with the Coast Guard racing stripe, and the crossed anchor logo representing the service. The Coast Guard is a unique maritime,
multi-missioned organization and the only Coast Guard in the United States. The visual identity of the Coast Guard is not muddled and will not be studied in this thesis.

The CIM dimension encompasses organizational features that are related to the company’s sense of purpose. An organization’s mission corresponds to its corporate philosophy and guides the organization direction explicitly or implicitly. Simões et al. (2005) postulated that the firm’s mission, values and beliefs should be disseminated throughout the organization as a platform for management and employee behavior. The implication is that company mission and values are essential aspects of the CIM process and must be communicated properly and interpreted by employees. Therefore, I postulate the following hypotheses using the MVD factor of CIM.

H15: Corporate image management is positively related to two-way communication
H16: Corporate image management is positively related to symmetrical communication
H17: Corporate image management is positively related to employee commitment
H18: Corporate image management is positively related to employee satisfaction
H19: Corporate image management is positively related to mission identification
H20: Corporate image management is positively related to organizational belonging

**SUMMARY OF RQ AND HYPOTHESES**

I am looking at the relationships among organizational identity (organizational belonging, mission identification, and corporate image management), public relations behaviors (two way communication, symmetrical communication), and associated organization-public relationships dimensions (employee satisfaction, employee commitment).

RQ1: How do Coast Guard employees perceive the Coast Guard’s organizational identity?
H1: Two-way communication is positively related to mission identification.
H2: Two-way communication is positively related to organizational belonging
H3: Symmetrical communication is positively related to two-way communication.
H4: Symmetrical communication is positively related to mission identification.
H5: Symmetrical communication is positively related to organizational belonging.
H6: Two-way communication is positively related to employee commitment.
H7: Symmetrical communication is positively related to positive employee commitment.
H8: Employee commitment is positively related to mission identification.
H9: Employee commitment is positively related to organizational belonging.
H10: Two-way communication is positively related to employee satisfaction.
H11: Symmetrical communication is positively related to positive employee satisfaction.
H12: Employee satisfaction is positively related to employee commitment.
H13: Employee satisfaction is positively related to mission identification.
H14: Employee satisfaction is positively related to organizational belonging.
H15: Corporate image management is positively related to two-way communication
H16: Corporate image management is positively related to symmetrical communication
H17: Corporate image management is positively related to employee satisfaction
H18: Corporate image management is positively related to employee commitment
H19: Corporate image management is positively related to mission identification
H20: Corporate image management is positively related to organizational belonging
METHOD

An on-line questionnaire was administered to 550 Coast Guard employees in San Diego. This purposive sample was selected because the San Diego area has a variety of units including an air station, two 378’ cutters (ships), a search and rescue station, law enforcement detachment, five patrol boats, as well as the subsets that support the operational units. To maintain anonymity of respondents, I grouped the units together and created only three categories for units: United States Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC) Boutwell, USCGC Sherman, and Sector San Diego. Each USCGC has approximately 150 personnel and Sector San Diego has 250. The Coast Guard has only 40,000 total service members. Coastguardsmen are constantly transferring duty stations and moving every two to four years. Even though geographically stationed in San Diego, its members can originate from anywhere in the United States. San Diego was also optimal due to the physical proximity of the researcher and San Diego State University. Survey participants were solicited through an email, asking them to complete the online questionnaire regarding their opinions of how the Coast Guard communicated its organizational identity with its employees. Data collection in March 2014 resulted in a survey access rate of 24.9% (n=137), with 102 completed surveys, for an actual response rate of 18.5%. The N is too small to do advanced statistical analysis.

SELF AS SCHOLAR

Even though I am the researcher and am employed by the Coast Guard, they did not pay me specifically to do this research above my salary as a Coast Guard Lieutenant. After graduating from the Coast Guard Academy in 2006, I traveled the world on High Endurance cutters (including Boutwell) primarily doing counter-narcotic patrols in South and Central America. Most Coastguardsmen have never done this mission. I also have never done other missions performed by the Coast Guard like ice breaking or port security. In this study, I am both an officer as well as a public relations graduate student, attempting to promote both fields through unbiased investigation. I reduced inevitable researcher subjectivity by grounding my hypotheses in literature and proven research methods. The survey questionnaire was not forced on any members. There was an option to make it mandatory.
based on my rank within the organization, but I did not abuse my power to get 100% participation in this thesis research.

**INSTRUMENTATION**

The survey (see Appendix) instrument was designed to gather information regarding respondents’ perceptions of public relations behaviors used by the Coast Guard, their levels of identification with the organization, and their demographic background. The questionnaire included seven organizational identity items (see Sha, 2009, p. 304), nine Corporate Identity Management Factors (see Simões et al., 2005, p. 161), five commitment and five satisfaction items (see Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 4) and some of Sha’s public relations dimensions factors: four for two-way communication, and four for symmetrical communication. Sha (2009) divided organizational identification in her study into (a) a sense of organizational belonging and (b) identification with the organization’s mission. All non-demographic questionnaire items were worded as statements and scored on a Likert-type scale as follows: *strongly disagree* = 1, *disagree* = 2, *neutral* = 3, *agree* = 4, and *strongly agree* = 5. Lastly, I asked six demographic questions measuring racial-ethnic background, age, gender, marital status, rank, amount of education, and operating unit. The questionnaire totaled 55 items.

I examined the relationships among the organizational identity, public relations behaviors, and OPR dimensions using the Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient. Alpha levels for all tests were set at \( p = .05 \). To determine the correlation between the factors, I used the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to measure the strength of the linear association between the variables I was measuring. This is denoted by the \( r \). Although the Pearson coefficient can be a negative number, I am measuring positive correlation so only \( r \) from +1 to 0 will constitute a positive relationship. A value less than 0 indicates a negative association; that is, as the value of one variable increases, the value of the other variable decreases. The hypotheses note that as one variable increases, the others will as well because they are positively correlated. I took each item in the construct, calculated their sum, then I averaged them to create the scale to which to measure against the other variables. The closer the number to 1, the stronger the relationship between the variables.
Identification with Organizational Identity

Organizational identity and associated identification have been defined and conceptualized, but rarely explored empirically (Ravasi & van Rekom, 2003; Simões et al., 2005; Sha, 2009; Whetten, 2006; Williams, 2008). My review of the literature in organizational identity and identification yielded helpful concepts from Simões et al. (2005) and Sha (2009). I used their items to determine actual knowledge of the organization’s mission including asking respondents to write the mission statement of the Coast Guard, as best they could, from memory. I added two other questions not previously used by Simões et al. (2005) or Sha (2009): “What do you think the official mission statement of the Coast Guard is?” and “What mission statement best reflects the Coast Guard as an organization?” These three initial questions were open ended and used to determine themes among respondents’ answers.

Simões et al.’s (2005) Corporate Identity Management (CIM) Scale incorporated multiple sources for their questionnaire. Their questionnaire included three subject areas measured: visual identity (degree of visual identity management), communications (breadth and degree of communications management) and philosophy, mission, and values (degree of mission and values dissemination). The researchers’ goals with these three subject areas were to determine the planning and management of their corporate identity. The questionnaire was only given to the supervisors. My study was not solely given to managers; therefore, those questions in the original CIM scale were excluded. The third measured construct in the CIM scale was visual identity management. In the Coast Guard, employees wear uniforms to work everyday and have a recognizable logo, in addition to the organization’s ships, helicopters, etc., thus the visual identity management element of the CIM scale was not needed for this study. I incorporated the degree of mission and values dissemination factor. This factor is internally focused, because it pertains to the articulation of business philosophy to employees (Simões et al., 2005, p. 163). This dissemination could be tested with a data-gathering program that assesses the extent to which all employees receive, share and are committed to the company’s mission and goals. The degree of mission and values dissemination factor came from literature from the corporate identity field; the scale was adopted from Sinkula, Baker, and Noordewier (1997) and from Baker and Sinkula (1999).
Public Relations Behaviors

The survey instrument replicated standard items measuring public relations behaviors, including two-way communication and symmetrical communication (see Sha, 2009). Two-way communication and symmetrical communication are indicia of excellent public relations (see Dozier, 1995). Testing these standard items on the Coast Guard as an organization will break ground in itself.

Hon and Grunig (1999) identified the six dimensions needed to have excellent organization-public relationships and developed reliable measures of these indicators. They believed that these dimensions helped build “successful public relations programs result[ing] in good relationships with strategic publics, which in turn makes organizations more effective by allowing them to achieve their goals” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 38). I only used commitment and satisfaction, as these two factors “provide valuable indicators of the extent to which employees are likely to support or constrain the mission of the organization” (J. E. Grunig, 1992, p. 549).

I added one item to the questionnaire that was not used in any previous research, but to lighten the mood of the questionnaire. In my thirteen years as a Coast Guard employee, I felt like we were constantly taking surveys of this and that, and no one cared what the results were. Thus, I created the reverse-scored item and included it under symmetrical communication, knowing full well that it would probably not be reliable and need to be excluded. It could be used in future research to measure organizational cynicism. It read: “I feel like I take surveys all the time, like this one, in the Coast Guard and my feedback does not result in organizational change.”

With respect to the order of information requested, I started intentionally with querying the respondents to state the mission statement of the Coast Guard by memory. This was to decrease the amount of common method variance. As a strength of the study, I measured in opposite direction from proposed causal direction from mission knowledge to public relations behaviors to OPR dimensions. Instead of asking questions concerning the antecedents first, I started the questionnaire with the perceived organizational identity of the organization and worked backwards.
RESULTS

RESEARCH QUESTION

To answer my research question, “How do Coast Guard employees perceive the Coast Guard’s organizational identity?” I set out to find the official mission statement of the United States Coast Guard as mission statements reflect organization identity. Does the official statement match the employee’s opinion? That should have been easy. Mission statements are often found on corporate web sites (Williams, 2008) and annual reports (Leuthesser & Kohli, 1997). So, on Jan. 06, 2014, I went to three places: the Coast Guard’s official website: (USCG, 2014a), the official USCG Facebook page (Facebook, 2014d), and the annual USCG report called the Posture Statement. I found the following mission statements:

1. For over two centuries the U.S. Coast Guard has safeguarded our Nation’s maritime interests in the heartland, in the ports, at sea, and around the globe. We protect the maritime economy and the environment, we defend our maritime borders, and we save those in peril. This history has forged our character and purpose as America’s Maritime Guardian — Always Ready for all hazards and all threats (USCG, 2014a).

2. The mission of the U.S. Coast Guard is: We are locally based, nationally deployed and globally connected. We are the United States Coast Guard (Facebook, 2014d).

3. The United States Coast Guard protects those on the sea, protects the nation from threats delivered by the sea, and protects the sea itself. Admiral Papp, Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG, 2013a).

After finding three completely different mission statements, I asked a few of the District Public Affairs Officers what the ‘official’ mission statement was. Public affairs officers are the experts on public relations; they are best informed about public relations issues and best qualified to answer public relations questions, including the goals of the organization. There are nine district public affairs officers, one assigned to each district. My seven colleagues and peers responded in discord:

- “It’s the one in the posture statement.”
- “The United States Coast Guard is a multi-missioned maritime service and one of the Nation’s five Armed Forces. Its mission is to protect the public, the environment, and U.S. economic interests – in the Nation’s ports and waterways, along the coast, on
international waters, or in any maritime region as required to support national security” (USCG, 1998).

- “I thought it was the one on my business card, ‘To protect those on the sea, protect the nation from threats delivered by the sea, and protect the sea itself.’ That’s what I have been telling people.”
- “None of the above: it is ‘Per Publication 1: Our mission is to ensure the safety, security, and stewardship of the Nation’s waters’” (USCG, 2014c).
- “It’s the Pub 1 mission statement combined with the Posture Statement: ‘Our mission is to ensure the safety, security, and stewardship of the Nation’s waters. To protect those on the sea, protect the nation from threats delivered by the sea, and protect the sea itself’”
- “The 2020 one.”

I knew we had a problem with more than just the employees being in line with the organization. It would be extremely difficult to measure perceptions of organizational identity and subsequent alignment with it, if there were multiple mission statements to measure it against.

Publication 1, referenced by some of the public affairs officers, is a book published by the Coast Guard. The mission statement is hidden. Admiral Papp, the Commandant and highest ranking member of the Coast Guard wrote the forward to the book, “[t]oday, as the Nation’s maritime first responder, we fulfill our present day strategic mission of ensuring the Safety, Security and Stewardship of the Nation’s waters by protecting those on the sea, protecting the Nation against threats delivered by sea, and protecting the sea itself” (USCG, 2014c). Although not verbatim, a similar phrase was used within a paragraph on the fifth page. The mission statement was never referenced again in the 132-page book. Admiral Papp’s wording was interesting; he used the phrase, “present day strategic mission” (USCG, 2014c). That expression means that as the leader of the organization, he understood the mission statement to be in state of flux and able to be influenced by external factors.

With a host of mission statements, I could not just ask the standard organizational identity and CIM items in the questionnaire. Multiple mission statements were communicated through various channels. First, I had to find out what employees thought the mission statement was. If they didn’t know it by memory, what mission statement would they choose from the published list to best describe the organization?
Coast Guard Mission Statements

I found seven mission statements from various sources, with none denoting itself as the “official”. Seven.

1. For over two centuries the U.S. Coast Guard has safeguarded our Nation’s maritime interests in the heartland, in the ports, at sea, and around the globe. We protect the maritime economy and the environment, we defend our maritime borders, and we save those in peril. This history has forged our character and purpose as America’s Maritime Guardian — Always Ready for all hazards and all threats. (USCG, 2014b)

2. The mission of the U.S. Coast Guard is: We are locally based, nationally deployed and globally connected. We are the United States Coast Guard. (Facebook, 2014d)

3. The United States Coast Guard protects those on the sea, protects the nation from threats delivered by the sea, and protects the sea itself. Admiral Papp (USCG, 2013a)

4. The United States Coast Guard exists to defend and preserve the United States. We protect the personal safety and security of our people; the marine transportation system and infrastructure; our natural and economic resources; and the territorial integrity of our nation—both internal and external threats, natural and man-made. We protect these interests in U.S. ports and inland waterways, along the coasts, on international waters. (USCG, 2014d)

5. The United States Coast Guard is a multi-missioned maritime service and one of the Nation’s five Armed Forces. Its mission is to protect the public, the environment, and U.S. economic interests — in the Nation’s ports and waterways, along the coast, on international waters, or in any maritime region as required to support national security (USCG, 1998).

6. The United States Coast Guard is a military, multi-mission, maritime force offering a unique blend of military, law enforcement, humanitarian, regulatory, and diplomatic capabilities. These capabilities support our three broad roles: maritime safety, maritime security, and maritime stewardship (USCG, 2014d).

7. The U.S. Coast Guard's mission is to protect the public, the environment, and U.S. economic interests — in the nation's ports and waterways, along the coast, on international waters, or in any maritime region as required to support national security (USCG, 2013b).

Other Armed Forces

Thinking that perhaps a similar problem existed with all the military branches, I conducted informal research to find the following:

Navy

The Navy communicated, “[t]he mission of the Navy is to maintain, train and equip combat-ready Naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression and maintaining
freedom of the seas” on their official Facebook page (Facebook, 2014c), their website (America’s Navy, 2014), among others. It was consistent through their channels.

**ARMY**

The U.S. Army’s mission statement of, “The Army’s mission is to fight and win our Nation’s wars by providing prompt, sustained land dominance across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of combatant commanders” was prominently displayed on their Facebook page (Facebook, 2014b), their official website (Army, 2014), and their posture statement (Army, n.d.).

**AIR FORCE**

The Air Force’s mission statement is, “Fly, Fight, Win, in air, space, and cyberspace.” I found this statement clearly labeled mission statement on the following channels, their Facebook page (Facebook, 2014a), their official website (Air Force, 2014) as well as their posture statement (Donley & Welsh, 2013). The Air Force did an incredible job weaving their mission statement throughout their posture statement, bringing the reader back to the basis of why the organization exists and why it should continue carrying out the said mission.

The problem is with the Coast Guard and not with our nation’s military to communicate mission statements.

**Themes from Open-Ended Questionnaire Items**

In the survey, I asked the participants to state the mission statement of the Coast Guard from memory. A few themes arose, including maritime safety and maritime security (21% of respondents), Search and Rescue (SAR) (20% of respondents), Law Enforcement, Drug Interdiction, Environment, Waterways, Service, Humanitarian, and America. Three respondents stated the Mission Statement from the Coast Guard Academy from memory. One replied, “I know the corps values (honor, respect, devotion to duty) but not the mission. I know the mission of the US Coast Guard Academy from memory.” Only one person out of 137 responded with any of the seven above-noted mission statements from memory and that person recalled mission statement #3. Most employees thought that “mission statement” meant the 11 statutory missions of the Coast Guard that we are directed to do by law (USCG, 2014b), which are:
• Ports, waterways, and coastal security
• Drug interdiction
• Aids to navigation
• Search and rescue
• Living marine resources
• Marine safety
• Defense readiness
• Migrant interdiction
• Marine environmental protection
• Ice operations
• Other law enforcement

Next, I asked which mission statement the respondents thought best represented our organization (see Table 1). Of the respondents, 45.1% chose mission #5 and 22.6 chose mission #6 as numbered above.

Table 1. Best Mission Statement of the Coast Guard as Perceived by its Employees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
<th>% Thought it is best</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. For over two centuries the U.S. Coast Guard has safeguarded our Nation’s maritime interests in the heartland, in the ports, at sea, and around the globe. We protect the …</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The mission of the U.S. Coast Guard is: We are locally based, nationally deployed and globally connected. We are the United States Coast Guard.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The United States Coast Guard protects those on the sea, protects the nation from threats delivered by the sea, and protects the sea itself.</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The United States Coast Guard exists to defend and preserve the United States. We protect the personal safety and security of our people; the marine transportation…</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The United States Coast Guard is a multi-missioned maritime service and one of the Nation’s five Armed Forces. Its mission is to protect the public, the environment…</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The United States Coast Guard is a military, multi-mission, maritime force offering a unique blend of military, law enforcement, humanitarian, regulatory, and diplomatic…</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The U.S. Coast Guard's mission is to protect the public, the environment, and U.S. economic interests- in the nation's ports and waterways, along the coast, on int'l…</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I asked, “What do you think the official mission statement of the Coast Guard is?” (see Table 2). Coastguardsmen thought that #4 was the official statement with 30.4% and #5 with 27.4%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Official Mission Statement of the Coast Guard as Perceived by its Employees</th>
<th>% Thought it is official</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. For over two centuries the U.S. Coast Guard has safeguarded our Nation’s maritime interests in the heartland, in the ports, at sea, and around the globe. We protect the …</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The mission of the U.S. Coast Guard is: We are locally based, nationally deployed and globally connected. We are the United States Coast Guard.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The United States Coast Guard protects those on the sea, protects the nation from threats delivered by the sea, and protects the sea itself.</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The United States Coast Guard exists to defend and preserve the United States. We protect the personal safety and security of our people; the marine transportation…</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The United States Coast Guard is a multi-missioned maritime service and one of the Nation’s five Armed Forces. Its mission is to protect the public, the environment…</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The United States Coast Guard is a military, multi-mission, maritime force offering a unique blend of military, law enforcement, humanitarian, regulatory, and diplomatic…</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The U.S. Coast Guard's mission is to protect the public, the environment, and U.S. economic interests- in the nation's ports and waterways, along the coast, on int'l…</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last item on the questionnaire asked, “What specific suggestions do you have that would make the Coast Guard mission statement more clear, a better place to work, or communicate more effectively with you?” Some of the responses were:

- “realign the Commandant vision with the Coast Guard mission statement”
- “Shorten the mission statement, make it applicable to multiple mission sets. Communication is simple, simply put the information out via an internal intranet site, and promote the world of work I perform, not just cutters and helos.”
- “I think the Coast Guard’s 3 Mission roles should be included in the Mission Statement. The more concise the better. If it's too long or wordy, it is harder for people to remember.”
- “Keep it short. Require it to be posted at units. Put it at the bottom of ALCOASTS. And press releases.”
“Communicate a long term vision or strategy that complements our multi-
mission, maritime character. We do not (still) communicate our overall value to
the American people at large & seek commensurate support from Congress.”

“The multi-mission aspect of the CG makes creating a concise, brief, mission
statement challenging. I don't believe that developing a better mission statement
would have any effect on my perception of the Coast Guard. I understand the
significance/importance of having a mission statement that reflects the intended
direction of the org for the sake of executive leadership, but at my level it isn't
relevant. The missions are clear to me, and I'm proud of MOST of them, but
greater clarity of those missions via a "better" mission statement is fairly
inconsequential to me.”

“Shorten the mission statement so it can be listed as a short slogan, like Honor,
Respect, and Devotion to Duty… I do not have it memorized word for word
because it is lengthy and wordy…. Make it short and sweet.”

“I don't even know what the coast guard mission statement is.”

“I am not interested in the Coast Guard mission statement. I believe I know what I
need to do to perform to the best of my ability, for the good of myself and the
service, and that my immediate supervisors almost always facilitate any
requirements I have. I have no malice toward the Coast Guard political cadre (the
most senior) I just don't see them as having anything to do with me.”

“Just ensure the mission statement is clear and easy to read. The public doesn't
always understand our lingo, so it is important that we word it well enough for the
public to understand.”

The ten participants above took the time at the end of the questionnaire to what would
make the Coast Guard mission statement more clear. The resounding theme was to make it
short, and simple, otherwise it would take hours of dedicated effort (like the Coast Guard
Academy one) to memorize. Memorizing the mission statement is the best way for
internalization and subsequent communicating with other publics. Other responses included
not being interested in what the mission statement is as it would not affect their performance
or them personally.

**RELIABILITY**

Hon and Grunig (1999) explained that reliability means that if you observe a
phenomenon, such as perceptions of a relationship, more than once or in different ways, then
you should get a similar response from the different measures. In other words, each item in
the same index should be measuring the same relationship and thus be highly correlated,
Measures of reliability usually are expressed by a statistic known as Cronbach’s alpha. Alpha is an overall measure of how well the items measuring the same characteristic correlate with each other. Generally a scale with an alpha less than .60 is not very reliable and an alpha that approaches .90 is excellent (Hon & Grunig, 1999). The more items include in the scale, the higher the alpha. Therefore, a shorter scale cannot be expected to have as high an alpha as a more one. I conducted reliability analysis of each item measuring the factors (see Tables 3-9).

Table 3. Two-Way Communication Mean and Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Cronbach's α if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Coast Guard listens to the opinions of its employees.</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coast Guard consults those affected by its policies during decision-making.</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coast Guard seeks the input of employees when making important decisions.</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for the Coast Guard to provide a way for employees to communicate with our leadership.</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg Mean Scale</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Mean is from 1-5, from 1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=neutral 4=agree 5=strongly agree

One item was excluded from the two-way communication scale, Table 3. The item read: “It is important for the Coast Guard to provide a way for employees to communicate with our leadership.” Excluding this item increases the alpha from .71 to .84. Yes, it is important for communication to take place between members and leadership. However, this item does not measure whether the organization practices this type of communication.

The other item stricken was in the satisfaction scale. Excluding it improved the alpha from 0.81 to 0.85. Due to the nature of the Coast Guard as a federal law enforcement agency, people might not necessarily ‘enjoy’ working with the organization that writes boating tickets and enforces maritime regulations. The question read, “Most people enjoy dealing with the
Table 4. Symmetrical Communication Mean and Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Cronbach's α if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before implementing changes to the organization, the Coast Guard researches and tries to understand employees' opinions.</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After completion of a new change in policy or procedure, the Coast Guard conducts an evaluation of these efforts using employee feedback.</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coast Guard not only tries to change employees' attitudes and behaviors, but also tries to change the attitude and behavior of the organizational leadership.</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coast Guard considers how its activities and tough schedules might affect its employees and adjusts them accordingly.</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avg Mean: 3.05  Cronbach's α: 0.71

Note: Mean is from 1-5, from 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=neutral 4= agree 5=strongly agree

Table 5. Commitment Mean and Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Cronbach's α if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that the Coast Guard is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can see that the Coast Guard wants to maintain a relationship with their employees.</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a long-lasting bond between the Coast Guard and me.</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compared to other organizations, I value my relationship with the Coast Guard more.</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would rather work together with the Coast Guard than any other organization.</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avg Mean: 3.60  Cronbach's α: 0.85

Note: Mean is from 1-5, from 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=neutral 4= agree 5=strongly agree
Table 6. Satisfaction Mean and Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Cronbach's α if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am happy being employed in the Coast Guard.</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both the organization and I benefit from our relationship.</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people like me are happy in their interactions with the Coast Guard.</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, I am pleased with my relationship with the Coast Guard.</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people enjoy dealing with the Coast Guard.</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avg Mean: 3.96  Cronbach's α: 0.81

Note: Mean is from 1-5, from 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=neutral 4= agree 5=strongly agree

Table 7. Mission Identification Mean and Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Cronbach's α if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am knowledgeable about the organization’s mission.</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I support the Coast Guard’s mission.</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mission of the organization is in line with my personal beliefs.</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, I believe in the mission of the Coast Guard.</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avg Mean: 4.25  Cronbach's α: 0.72

Note: Mean is from 1-5, from 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=neutral 4= agree 5=strongly agree

Coast Guard." This item does not measure satisfaction in the organization the same way it could in other organizations.

With these two items excluded from the scales, I calculated the new reliability coefficients and means in Tables 10 and 11.

In Table 12 are the Cronbach reliabilities that I found using the Coast Guard as an organization. Next to my findings, I included the Cronbach reliabilities found in previous studies using the same items. Most items were higher in this study as compared to prior research.
### Table 8. Organizational Belonging Mean and Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Cronbach's α if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No matter what changes occur internal to the organization, I will never drop my CG affiliation.</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel proud to be a member of the Coast Guard.</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I view my status as a member of the Coast Guard as an important part of my life.</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avg Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.10</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cronbach's α</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scale</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.82</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Mean is from 1-5, from 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=neutral 4= agree 5=strongly agree

### Table 9. CIM Corporate Identity Management Factor Mean and Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Cronbach's α if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a total agreement on our mission across all levels and business areas</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Coastguardsmen are committed to achieving the company’s goals</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a clear concept of who we are as an organization and where we are going.</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coast Guard’s values and mission are regularly communicated to employees</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior management shares the corporate mission statement with employees</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees view themselves as partners in charting the direction of the Coast Guard</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do not have a well defined mission statement (R)</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers periodically discuss corporate mission and values</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All employees are aware of the relevant values</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avg Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.25</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cronbach's α</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scale</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.83</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Mean is from 1-5, from 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=neutral 4= agree 5=strongly agree
Note: These are only Mission Values Dissemination items of the entire CIM scale
Table 10. Updated Two-Way Communication Mean and Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Cronbach's α if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Coast Guard listens to the opinions of its employees.</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coast Guard consults those affected by its policies during decision-making.</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coast Guard seeks the input of employees when making important decisions.</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for the Coast Guard to provide a way for employees to communicate with our leadership.</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avg Mean | Cronbach's α
3.00     | 0.84

Note: Mean is from 1-5, from 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=neutral 4= agree 5=strongly agree

Table 11. Updated Satisfaction Mean and Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Cronbach's α if item deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am happy being employed in the Coast Guard.</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both the organization and I benefit from our relationship.</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people like me are happy in their interactions with the Coast Guard.</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, I am pleased with my relationship with the Coast Guard.</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people enjoy dealing with the Coast Guard.</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avg Mean | Cronbach's α
4.01     | 0.85

Note: Mean is from 1-5, from 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=neutral 4= agree 5=strongly agree

I used the Cronbach’s alpha (α) coefficient to analyze the reliability of items. Researchers studying these constructs before found the following alpha reliabilities: organizational belonging $\alpha=.64$ (Sha, 2009, p. 303), mission identification $\alpha=.82$, (Sha, 2009, p. 303), corporate image management $\alpha=.81$ (Simões et al., 2005, p. 162), two way communication $\alpha=.67$ (Sha, 2009, p. 307), symmetrical communication $\alpha=.59$ (Sha, 2009, p. 308), employee satisfaction $\alpha=.89$ (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 40), and employee commitment $\alpha=.85$ (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 40).
Table 12. This Study Reliability Coefficient Versus Previous Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>My Cronbach α</th>
<th>Researched</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-Way Communication</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symmetrical</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Identification</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Belonging</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Image Management</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Means**

I surveyed the Coastguardsmen on their perception of the Coast Guard’s public relations behaviors, organizational identity, along with commitment and satisfaction factors. I used the Likert scale ranging from 1-5: 1=strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=neutral 4= agree 5=strongly agree with the statement. The participants were primarily neutral (µ=3.37) with respect to two-way communication. Symmetrical communication had an even lower and more neutral mean (µ=3.05). Coastguardsmen are relatively committed (µ=3.60) to the organization and agree (µ=3.96) that they are satisfied with their employment. Mission identification has the highest scale mean (µ=4.25) among the constructs, and that included the items, “I am knowledgeable about the organization’s mission” and “I support the Coast Guard’s mission” (all questionnaire items are in the Appendix). Organizational belonging also resonated well with Coast Guard employees. Coastguardsmen agreed (µ=4.10) that they have a sense of belonging to the organization. The participants were neutral (µ=3.25) on the CIM measures, implying that the Coast Guard does not do a particularly good job of disseminating the values and mission of the organization.

A few of the individual items require further explanation. One measure stated, “The Coast Guard seeks the input of employees when making important decisions.” Employees mildly disagreed with that statement (µ=2.91). Coast Guard employees did not think that the management sought input from its employees. One employee satisfaction statement read, “I am happy being employed in the Coast Guard.” One organizational belonging item stated, “I feel proud to be a member of the Coast Guard.” The participants agreed they were happy (µ=4.21) and proud (µ=4.45) being in the Coast Guard. The most striking of all is the items
in the mission identification construct. As a scale, this was the most agreed with among the employees. “I support the Coast Guard’s mission” (µ=4.50) and “Generally speaking, I believe in the mission of the Coast Guard” (µ=4.28) were two of the items in the scale. These two items were the most agreed statements on the entire questionnaire. Additionally, these questions were asked following the listing of the seven mission statements and asking to recite the mission statement from memory. None could state a mission statement from memory. There was discord on the best and official mission statement. Despite this, Coastguardsmen still support and believe in the organization.

**HYPOTHESES**

As noted in Table 13 all relationships have positive Pearson product moment coefficients, meaning that all Hs in this thesis were supported.

H1: Two-way communication is positively related to mission identification.

When employees perceived that two-way communication is being used, they also identify with the organization’s mission. H1 was significant and thus supported: \( r (98) = 0.42, p < .01\).

H2: Two-way communication is positively related to organizational belonging.

When an organization communicates and listens to its stakeholders, the employees have a higher sense of belonging to the organization. H2 was significant and thus supported: \( r (98) = 0.34, p < .01\).

H3: Symmetrical communication is positively related to two-way communication.

As symmetrical communication is under the two-way communication umbrella, I proposed earlier that they would be positively related. When an organization communicates symmetrically, they also communicate using feedback. H3 was significant and thus supported: \( r (98) = 0.59, p < .01\).

H4: Symmetrical communication is positively related to mission identification.

The results also showed that when an organization uses symmetrical communication employees positively relate to the mission identification of the organization. H4 was significant and thus supported: \( r (98) = 0.22, p < .05\).

H5: Symmetrical communication is positively related to organizational belonging.
Table 13. Cross-Correlations for Organizational Identity and Public Relations Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Two-Way Communication</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Symmetrical</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>.69**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.76**</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mission Identification</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Organizational Belonging</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Corporate Image Management</td>
<td>.69**</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>.70**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.52**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N=98 for all Pearson’s correlations reported.
*denotes significance at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).
** denotes significance at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).
Belonging to an organization is one of the factors of organizational identity. Interestingly, when an organization uses symmetrical communication, mission identification and organizational belonging have the same Pearson product moment coefficient. H5 was significant and thus supported: $r (98) = 0.22, p < .05$.

H6: Two-way communication is positively related to employee commitment.

Increased employee commitment was shown to positively related to both two-way communication as well as symmetrical communication. H6 was significant and thus supported: $r (98) = 0.69, p < .01$.

H7: Symmetrical communication is positively related to positive employee commitment.

Symmetrical communication resulted in a much smaller correlation coefficient in relation to two-way communication. H7 was significant and thus supported: $r (98) = 0.42, p < .01$.

H8: Employee commitment is positively related to mission identification.

The organizational public relations dimensions of employee commitment and satisfaction were measured against seemingly other dependent variables of organizational identity. I hypothesized that as these factors increased, the others would be higher as well. Employee commitment was positively related to mission identification. H8 was significant and thus supported: $r (98) = 0.52, p < .01$.

H9: Employee commitment is positively related to organizational belonging.

In addition, employee commitment is also positively related to organizational belonging with the same coefficient. H9 was significant and thus supported: $r (98) = 0.52, p < .01$.

H10: Two-way communication is positively related to employee satisfaction.

An employee’s satisfaction increases with their perception of two-way communication. The two factors are positively related. H10 was significant and thus supported: $r (98) = 0.59, p < .01$.

H11: Symmetrical communication is positively related to positive employee satisfaction.

In the same way, when an organization communicates symmetrically with their stakeholders, employees are more satisfied. Symmetrical communication is less correlated to
employee satisfaction than the overarching two-way communication. H11 was significant and thus supported: $r (98)= 0.40, p< .01$.

H12: Employee satisfaction is positively related to employee commitment.

Employees that are satisfied with their employment position are also committed to the organization. These organizational public relations dimensions have the strongest correlation in this study. H12 was significant and thus supported: $r (98)= 0.76, p< .01$.

H13: Employee satisfaction is positively related to mission identification.

Employee satisfaction is also correlated to the organizational identity dimensions of mission identification and organizational belonging. H13 was significant and thus supported: $r (98)= 0.50, p< .01$.

H14: Employee satisfaction is positively related to organizational belonging.

When compared to mission identification, organizational belonging has a stronger relationship with employee satisfaction. H14 was significant and thus supported: $r (98)= 0.65, p< .01$.

H15: Corporate image management is positively related to two-way communication

Adding the Corporate Image Management mission and values dissemination (MVD) scale showed another layer of correlation between the variables tested. CIM has a positive relationship with two-way communication. Two-way communication is related to the dissemination of the organization’s mission and values. H15 was significant and thus supported: $r (98)= 0.69, p< .01$.

H16: Corporate image management is positively related to symmetrical communication

When an organization communicates symmetrically, the perception of positive mission and values dissemination increases. Symmetrical communication was not as highly related to CIM as two-way communication was. H16 was significant and thus supported: $r (98)= 0.53, p< .01$.

H17: Corporate image management is positively related to employee commitment

The third scale used to measure organizational identity is also positively related to the organizational public relations dimensions of commitment and satisfaction. H17 was significant and thus supported: $r (98)= 0.67, p< .01$.

H18: Corporate image management is positively related to employee satisfaction
Similar to commitment, employee satisfaction is also positively related to CIM. H18 was significant and thus supported: $r (98)= 0.70, p< .01$.

H19: Corporate image management is positively related to mission identification

How an organization disseminates their mission and values using CIM scale is also positively related to Sha’s organizational identity constructs of mission identification and organizational belonging. The correlation is not as strong as I had envisioned, but still positively correlated. H19 was significant and thus supported: $r (98)= 0.55, p< .01$.

H20: Corporate image management is positively related to organizational belonging

A weaker correlation, albeit positive, CIM was positively related to organizational belonging. H20 was significant and thus supported: $r (98)= 0.52, p< .01$.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

Post-hoc analyses of demographic information provided by the respondents were performed to determine variations. Independent samples t-tests were summed then averaged to investigate possible demographic differences in the respondents’ perceptions of mission identification, symmetrical communication, two-way communication, satisfaction, and commitment. There were no statistically significant differences by gender on the mean scores of any of the summed dependent measures.

Of the respondents who chose to indicate their gender, 82% were men (n=76) and 18% women (n=17), which is reflective of typical gender distributions in the Coast Guard today (86% and 14% respectively see USCG, 2012). The majority of respondents (58% or n=53) were enlisted members. The highest responding age group were 30-35 year olds (28% or n=26) doubling the response rate of the other age groups. Older members (38% of the members were 36-50+) responded to the questionnaire more than the younger generation (34% of respondents were 17-29 years old). The majority of the respondents were married (60%), Caucasian (88%), males (82%), from Sector San Diego (61%).

For racial and ethnic backgrounds, respondents were allowed to select more than one answer option. Most respondents who answered this question were White or Caucasian (88%). Asians or Asian Americans comprised 2% of the respondents; Hispanics or Latinos comprised 12% and Blacks or African Americans comprised 4.5%. Respondents could
choose multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds, hence why the percentages do not add up to 100.
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients among the five constructs showed several significant relationships. Organizational identification was positively related to symmetrical communication, which was positively related to two-way communication, which positively related to satisfaction and commitment.

Employees agreed or strongly agreed that the Coast Guard practices symmetrical communication: 37%. Similarly, 48% agreed or strongly agreed that the Coast Guard practices two-way communication as an organization.

USCG employees have strong organizational identity; as they identify with the organization’s mission, they tend to also have a sense of belonging to the organization. The Corporate Identity Management scale aimed to evaluate the “articulation of the company’s philosophy and mission, organization values, and norms are unified and can be shared by all stakeholders” (Simões et al., 2005, p. 158). Coast Guard employees admitted knowing and supporting the organization, but were unable to articulate this knowledge or support, as the measures sought to determine. These findings indicated that employees perceive that they know (84%) and support (98%) the mission of the Coast Guard, in spite of the organization not having an official mission statement. It is fascinating that more people support the mission of the Coast Guard than even know it. Sha (2009) stated, “it would be difficult for people to identify with an organizational mission that is constantly in flux” (p. 306). The respondents identified positively with the organization, even though no fixed mission statement was in place.

When an organization’s mission statement is in flux, inconsistent, or non-existent, it is difficult for stakeholders to express themselves. To consistently and coherently articulate employees’ goals and identity, continuous dialogue through all appropriate channels must used. Men (2012) added, “a shared identity is developed through continuous dialogues with stakeholders, and all communication initiatives, including marketing messages, public relations messages, and messages sent internally are harmonious with and reflect the shared identity” (p. 39). Therefore, in order to have a shared identity, the organization must
consistently behave in line with its mission as well as continuously communicate this identity to its stakeholders.

Of note, 137 participants agreed to do the questionnaire. After the three open-ended mission statement questions, fewer than 100 finished. Why did people choose to take the survey and then quit after the first three questions? In this self-selected sample, the apathetic Coastguardmen did not respond. My results include those who want to improve the organization and desire their opinion to be heard. The participants didn’t know that they were specifically helping me, Karen Love, as a Lieutenant and former Operations Officer of a San Diego-based ship. My last name changed in 2013, since leaving the ship in 2012. Therefore, the influence that my name in the “from” line was nullified by my new last name from which the email came. The respondents didn’t know they were helping me specifically.

LIMITATIONS

This study was limited by a relatively small sample size, with only 98 members completing the questionnaire out of the 40,000+ person organization. This small N resulted in my inability to do advanced statistical analysis on these thesis results. Additionally, the questionnaire was voluntary to complete and did not necessarily get a good response from those apathetic, too busy, or felt like sharing his or her opinion with me did not matter to increasing organizational effectiveness. To measure organizational identity, I used Sha (2009) and Simões et al.’s (2005) scales. These CIM measures could be bolstered to include other facets of organizational identification not normally applied to public relations.

PUBLIC RELATIONS IMPLICATIONS

Public relations practitioners and academics can see the benefit from studying organizational identity and bringing this rich vein of information into our practice. This is mostly unexplored, but essential to understanding the internal public as well as the external stakeholders. Communicating a clear, consistent, and concise mission statement facilitates this venture. Every organization wants to be unique and set apart from the rest of the field, with satisfied, committed, and knowledgeable employees.

Public relations practitioners and academics can see the implications of this research into organizational identity as important to the field.
Also to note is the Coast Guard employee preference for two way communication versus symmetrical communication. Although symmetrical communication is seen to be most excellent, maybe military organizations see more value in a stable environment with established training, tactics, and procedures. I recommend that other public relations practitioners use Sha’s (2009) Mission identification factors, Simões et al.’s (2005), CIM items, as well as symmetrical versus two way communication and other public relations behaviors to find what employees in all industries find to be their “central, distinctive, and enduring” (Albert & Whetten, 1985) characteristics as an organization.

Sha (2009) measured four of the same hypotheses as found in this study. I replicated a part of her study using the same organizational identification (mission identification and organizational belonging) and public relations dimensions (two-way communication and symmetrical communication) measures. She found that two-way communication was positively correlated to mission identification \( r (151) = .39, p < .01 \) and organizational belonging \( r (151) = .30, p < .01 \). Additionally, symmetrical communication was positively correlated to mission identification \( r (151) = .52, p < .01 \) and organizational belonging \( r (151) = .33, p < .01 \) (Sha, 2009, p. 305). In my results, the correlations between two-way communication measures were all higher than those correlations to symmetrical communication. Considering that symmetrical communication is most excellent (J. E. Grunig, 1992), it is surprising to see two-way communication having higher correlation coefficients than symmetrical communication. Sha’s (2009) “findings indicated that the strongest correlation in this set was between mission identification and symmetrical communication” (p. 308). I found the correlation between mission identification and symmetrical communication to be \( r (98) = .22 \) and the lowest correlation of all my 20 hypotheses.

Public relations practitioners should consider using the complete CIM scale to measure their company. The correlations using the MVD construct had higher correlations than the organizational identification with the OPR dimensions and public relations behaviors. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients were similar with mission identification \( \alpha = .81 \), organizational belonging \( \alpha = .82 \), and CIM \( \alpha = 0.83 \).

Since public relations practitioners are interested and responsible for the relationships with stakeholders inside and outside the organization, each should make sure the messages
they are sending are consistent to what upper management seeks to be the organizational identity of the company. This starts with a clear definition of the organization’s purpose through the mission statement. Decramer et al. (2011) conjectured, “[m]ission statements are the starting point of every strategic initiative. Only a clear definition of an organization’s purpose makes it possible to formulate realistic and coherent goals (p. 469).

**COAST GUARD RECOMMENDATIONS**

Messaging must be consistent among all channels. Members of the Coast Guard know ‘what’ the missions are of the Coast Guard, but do not know what the organization stands for or what the organization’s identity is. The Facebook page, Twitter account, the official website, the recruiting website, etc. should all have the same information and state the mission of the organization. There must be congruence between the messaging to internal and external stakeholders. If the “official” mission statement used by public affairs officers is the one in Publication 1, published in 2014, and stated nowhere else but in this printed handbook, it is difficult to communicate to external stakeholders who do not have access to the physical publication.

We have seen that the most productive relationships are those that benefit both parties rather than those designed to benefit the organization only (Hon & Grunig, 1999). These symmetrical systems of communication make organizations, like the Coast Guard, more effective by building open, trusting, committed, and satisfied relationships with employee stakeholders (see L. A. Grunig et al., 2002). Coastguardsmen are loyal, committed, and mostly satisfied with their employment in the Coast Guard. If understanding by the employees of the strategic direction of our organization is gained, then the employees can, in turn, be informed spokespeople and relay the Coast Guard’s philosophy and goals to other stakeholders.

I recommend making our official mission statement the one from the Posture Statement and already thought of to be the official one by many public affairs officers: “The United States Coast Guard protects those on the sea, protects the nation from threats delivered by the sea, and protects the sea itself.” It is short, all encompassing, and easy to memorize. It rolls off the tongue almost as easily as the Coast Guard Academy one that is mounted to every dorm room.
A follow-on study should use some of these same criteria for external audiences, particularly partners who work with the Coast Guard daily, other governmental agencies, fishermen, law enforcement, recreational boaters, etc. Another Coast Guard public relations graduate student could research the external audience’s perception of the organizational identity of the Coast Guard. This should happen following the roll-out of the “official” mission statement of the Coast Guard. These observations should be compared to this study as well as a re-survey of Coast Guard employees.
CONCLUSION

Employees are empowered to communicate and initiate dialogue publicly. Being a member of the military and of the federal government, everything said in person, in writing, or virtually is associated with the Coast Guard. This communicated information could portray the organization and the individual either positively or negatively. What employees say about the organization “is often perceived to be more credible and authentic than messages from senior management or the public relations team” (Men, 2012, p. 41). Therefore, it is imperative that employees are given consistent information on the goals and vision of the organization. How employees perceive the organization overflows into what they say publicly to other stakeholders.

The creation of a corporate identity often begins with the articulation of a business philosophy. The business philosophy can be expressed in the mission statement to convey a sense of commonality and purpose. Thus, an organization’s mission provides the basis for its identity and lays down the core direction for employee conduct (Ravasi & van Rekom, 2003; Simões et al., 2005, p. 158). In short, linking back to the original Albert and Whetten (1985) definition, organizational identity is a common set of beliefs set out by senior management about what is “central, enduring, and distinctive in an organization” (p. 273). The Coast Guard has endured since 1790 and is a unique organization, almost a niche within the military and the Department of Homeland Security. That is why a single, simple mission statement is essential to explain our overarching philosophy as Coastguardsmen both individually and as members of the organization.

Even more, a strong organizational identity in the eyes of the employees reinforces internal identification with the organization’s mission, values, beliefs, goals and objectives. Men (2012) argued that this identity helps to stimulate more loyal, motivated, and engaged workers, which leads to superior organizational effectiveness with all employees and stakeholders going in the same direction.

Finally, the Coast Guard has been serving the American people for more than 200 years. What is central, enduring, and distinctive about the Coast Guard? “The United States Coast Guard protects those on the sea, protects the nation from threats delivered by the sea,
and protects the sea itself” (USCG, 2014c). That organizational identity needs to be clearly articulated to its members, so that in turn, Coastguardsmen can be informed spokespeople helping to communicate “who we are” and what our mission is.
REFERENCES


Public Relations Society of America [PRSA]. (2013). *What is public relations?* Retrieved from http://www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/PublicRelationsDefined/#.U3qImyhOt0k8


APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS
QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

How Employees Perceive the Organizational Identity of the United States Coast Guard
LT Karen Love

From memory, state the Mission Statement of the Coast Guard_______

The following mission statement best reflects the Coast Guard as an organization:
Mission statements, 1-7 [ranked 1-7]

What do you think the official mission statement is of the Coast Guard?

The Coast Guard’s Mission is defined differently on 7 different Coast Guard sites:

The United States Coast Guard exists to defend and preserve the United States. We protect the personal safety and security of our people; the marine transportation system and infrastructure; our natural and economic resources; and the territorial integrity of our nation–from both internal and external threats, natural and man-made. We protect these interests in U.S. ports and inland waterways, along the coasts, on international waters. (http://www.gocoastguard.com/discovering-our-roles)

The United States Coast Guard is a multimissioned maritime service and one of the Nation’s five Armed Forces. Its mission is to protect the public, the environment, and U.S. economic interests – in the Nation’s ports and waterways, along the coast, on international waters, or in any maritime region as required to support national security. (Coast Guard 2020)

For over two centuries the U.S. Coast Guard has safeguarded our Nation’s maritime interests in the heartland, in the ports, at sea, and around the globe. We protect the maritime economy and the environment, we defend our maritime borders, and we save those in peril. This history has forged our character and purpose as America’s Maritime Guardian — Always Ready for all hazards and all threats.
The United States Coast Guard is a military, multi-mission, maritime force offering a unique blend of military, law enforcement, humanitarian, regulatory, and diplomatic capabilities. These capabilities support our three broad roles: maritime safety, maritime security, and maritime stewardship. (www.gocastguard.com)

The U.S. Coast Guard’s mission is to protect the public, the environment, and U.S. economic interests — in the nation’s ports and waterways, along the coast, on international waters, or in any maritime region as required to support national security. (http://www.uscg.mil/civilian/wa_mission.asp)

The United States Coast Guard protects those on the sea, protects the nation from threats delivered by the sea, and protects the sea itself. Admiral Papp (Posture Statement)

The mission of the U.S. Coast Guard is: We are locally based, nationally deployed and globally connected. We are the United States Coast Guard. (Facebook)

-------------------------------------------------------------------------

Likert Scale Items - strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, neutral=3, agree=4, and strongly agree=5.

**Organizational Identification** (Sha, 2009, p. 304)

**Mission Identification**
I am knowledgeable about the organization’s mission.
I support the Coast Guard’s mission.
The mission of the organization is in line with my personal beliefs.
Generally speaking, I believe in the mission of the Coast Guard.

**Organizational Belonging**
No matter what changes occur internal to the organization, I will never drop my Coast Guard affiliation.
I feel proud to be a member of the Coast Guard.
I view my status as a member of the Coast Guard as an important part of my life.
CIM Corporate Identity Management Factors (Simoes, 2005, p. 161)

There is a total agreement on our mission across all levels and business areas
All Coastguardsmen are committed to achieving the company’s goals
There is a clear concept of who we are as an organization and where we are going.
The Coast Guard’s values and mission are regularly communicated to employees
Senior management shares the corporate mission statement with employees
Employees view themselves as partners in charting the direction of the Coast Guard
We do not have a well defined mission statement (R)
Managers periodically discuss corporate mission and values
All employees are aware of the relevant values (norms about what is important,
how to behave, and appropriate attitudes).

Two of the Six Dimensions of Organization-Public Relationships: Grunig and Hon
(1999, p. 4)

Commitment
I feel that the Coast Guard is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.
I can see that the Coast Guard wants to maintain a relationship with their employees.
There is a long-lasting bond between the Coast Guard and me.
Compared to other organizations, I value my relationship with the Coast Guard more.
I would rather work together with the Coast Guard than any other organization.

Satisfaction
I am happy being employed in the Coast Guard.
Both the organization and I benefit from our relationship.
Most people like me are happy in their interactions with the Coast Guard.
Generally speaking, I am pleased with my relationship with the Coast Guard.
Most people enjoy dealing with the Coast Guard.
Public Relations Dimensions (Sha, 2009)

Two Way Communication
The Coast Guard listens to the opinions of its employees.
The Coast Guard consults those affected by its policies during decision-making.
The Coast Guard seeks the input of employees when making important decisions.
It is important for the Coast Guard to provide a way for employees to communicate with our leadership.

Symmetrical Communication
Before implementing changes to the organization, the Coast Guard researches and tries to understand employees’ opinions.
After completion of a new change in policy or procedure, the Coast Guard conducts an evaluation of these efforts using employee feedback.
The Coast Guard not only tries to change employees’ attitudes and behaviors, but also tries to change the attitude and behavior of the organizational leadership.
The Coast Guard considers how its activities and tough schedules might affect its employees and adjusts them accordingly.

Demographic Information:
Gender
Race/ethnicity
Education
Age
Rank
Unit

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Karen Love Kutkiewicz is an active-duty Lieutenant in the United States Coast Guard, spending five years out to sea on Coast Guard Cutters primarily focused on counter-narcotic and federal law enforcement. Karen is a graduate student at San Diego State University pursuing her Master of Arts in Communication, Emphasis in Mass Communication and Media Studies with a concentration in public relations. Her interests within the discipline of public relations include organizational internal communication, identity, and credibility in crisis communication. After graduation, Karen will be the District 1 Coast Guard Public Affairs Officer in Boston, Mass. Karen received an undergraduate degree from the United States Coast Guard Academy in Operations Research and Computer Analysis in New London, Conn.