

DIFFERENTIAL FRAMING: WHEN MEANING DEPENDS ON MOTIVE

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DIFFERENTIAL FRAMING: WHEN MEANING DEPENDS ON MOTIVE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iii |
| LIST OF TABLES | vi |
| SUMMARY | viii |
| <u>CHAPTER</u> | |
| 1 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Framing as Social Cognition | 4 |
| Framing in the Cognitive Process | 4 |
| The Meaning of Meaning | 5 |
| Schemata | 7 |
| Availability | 7 |
| Accessibility | 8 |
| Differential Framing | 11 |
| Justification Mechanisms | 11 |
| The Motive-Trait Link | 13 |
| The Motives to Achieve and Avoid Failure | 15 |
| Two Classes of Motives | 15 |
| The Motive to Achieve | 16 |
| The Motive to Avoid Failure | 19 |
| Evidence of Differential Interpretations | 21 |
| Organizational Culture | 24 |
| Strong Culture | 25 |
| Differential Framing and Organizational Culture | 26 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Perfectionistic and Achievement Cultures | 27 |
| Conventional and Dependent Cultures | 28 |
| Affiliative Culture | 29 |
| Summary – Hypotheses | 30 |
| 2 THE PRESENT STUDY | 32 |
| Participants | 32 |
| Sample 1 | 32 |
| Sample 2 | 32 |
| Measures | 33 |
| Conditional Reasoning Test-Relative Motive Strength | 33 |
| Culture Descriptions | 34 |
| Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire and Test Anxiety Scale | 36 |
| Procedure | 37 |
| Results | 37 |
| Reliabilities | 37 |
| AM Cultures | 38 |
| FF Cultures | 40 |
| Affiliative Cultures | 41 |
| Discussion | 43 |
| 3 GENERAL DISCUSSION | 52 |
| Limitations and Directions for Future Research | 54 |
| Conclusion | 56 |
| APPENDIX A: Justification Mechanisms for Achievement Motivation | 58 |
| APPENDIX B: Justification Mechanisms for Fear of Failure | 59 |
| APPENDIX C: Organizational Culture Descriptions | 61 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Internal-Consistency Reliability of Measures | 38 |
| Table 2: Intercorrelations Among Measures | 43 |
| Table 3: Distributions of CRT-RMS and AM and FF Scales | 48 |
| Table 4: CRT-RMS and Scale-Item Correlations | 50 |

SUMMARY

Differential framing occurs when individuals with different latent motives assign qualitatively different meanings to the same attributes or events in the environment (James & Mazerolle, 2002; James & McIntyre, 1996). The implications of this phenomenon for the explanation and prediction of behavior are substantial: In perfectly logical fashions, individuals in exactly the same situation have qualitatively different experiences. In this way, differential framing mediates the relationship between motives and the behaviors that comprise traits. This dissertation tested several propositions associated with this phenomenon, and the results tentatively suggest that individuals with contrasting motives form qualitatively distinct impressions of the same organizational cultures.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The modern workplace is an information-rich environment, and the stimuli available to employees on a daily basis are diverse and numerous. Meeting requests, office jokes, feedback sessions, policy modifications, status reports, supervisor presentations, and organizational calls-to-action are just some of the events to which employees may attend. Yet for their abundance and salience, these attributes of the workplace hold no particular meaning for employees until they are given some type of interpretation (Hamilton, 2005). That is, information in the workplace is evaluatively ambiguous until an employee imposes his or her evaluation on it. This process by which information is placed into an interpretative category and evaluated (i.e., given meaning) is called *framing* (James & Mazerolle, 2002; James & McIntyre, 1996), and it is an important step that informs subsequent judgments, affective reactions, decisions, and behaviors (Hamilton, 2005). In this way, framing forms the basis of how individuals reason and adapt to their environments – such as the workplace.

Differential framing occurs when stimuli – people, events, environments – are assigned qualitatively disparate meanings by individuals with different *latent motives* (James & Mazerolle, 2002). Latent motives are unconscious and largely inaccessible to the individual, and their impact on reasoning (i.e., the framing and analysis of stimulus information) is the centerpiece of what James and colleagues (James, 1998; James & Mazerolle, 2002; James & McIntyre, 1996) refer to as *conditional reasoning*. Conditional reasoning means that the outcome of the reasoning process is conditional on the

personality of the individual doing the reasoning. That is, what is considered a reasonable and justified behavioral adjustment to the environment will be determined by the personality of the reasoner (James, 1998).

The core assumption of conditional reasoning is that individuals like to believe that – for the most part – they behave sensibly and rationally, as opposed to irrationally or foolishly (James, 1998; James & Mazerolle, 2002). Accordingly, people tend to frame and analyze the world in ways that *justify* the expression of behavior to which they are predisposed. Evidence for this can be found in the reasons people provide for their behavior (see James, 1998). This assumption is congruent with other theories about how individuals equilibrate their cognitions and behavior (Bem, 1967, 1972; Festinger, 1957; see also Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) and is central to understanding how framing is a critical link to behavior: (a) People want to behave in certain ways, and (b) they want to believe their behavior is rational and sensible. The result of these twin desires is that individuals interpret information from the environment in a manner that that will allow them to justify their desired behavior. For example, a person prone to violence and desirous of acting out violently likely will interpret stimulus information in the environment in a way that will justify violent behavior. Walking down a city street, a violence-prone individual likely will interpret (i.e., frame) a comment from a homeless person in way that justifies a violent response (i.e., a behavioral adjustment to the environment), while a person motivated to act non-violently will interpret the comment in a manner that justifies a non-violent response. This implies that the meaning assigned to the stimulus information will differ depending on the latent motives of the perceivers. This is differential framing.

This dissertation examined differential framing through the lens of organizational culture, the shared norms, values, and assumptions within an organization (Schein, 1996). The goal was to highlight how individuals with different latent motives can come to assign qualitatively distinct meanings to the same organizational culture. In doing so, this study aimed to make several important contributions to the broad field of organizational science. First, evidence of the differential framing of organizational cultures would elucidate how individuals with different personalities can agree on the *intensity* of a culture (i.e., its strength) yet regard the *direction* of the culture (i.e., its nature) quite differently. Such a distinction answers calls for research to distinguish the meaning employees impute to the workplace from those assumed by researchers (e.g., Rentsch, 1990). Second, the elucidation of differential framing would specify a mechanism by which individual motives compel the behaviors that come to comprise traits. As will be discussed, motives and traits are distinct concepts, and the establishment of a critical explanatory link between the two will help bridge the gap between the trait and social-cognitive approaches to the study of personality (Cervone, 1991). Finally, the operation of differential framing among individuals dominated by the motives to achieve and avoid failure would contribute both to the understanding of those motives and the conditional-reasoning approach to personality put forth by James and colleagues (e.g., James, 1998). This dissertation aims to clarify and extend personality theory, provide an account of individual differences in the assignment of meaning, and illustrate but one potential application of the phenomenon within organizational science.

Framing as Social Cognition

Conceptualizations of the term *framing* have taken many forms over the last several decades, and for the sake of clarity it is necessary to distinguish among the them. For example, sociologists have employed the concept of frames to investigate how social movements and collective actions engage and galvanize individuals (e.g., Benford & Snow, 2000; Goffman, 1974); cognitive psychologists have referred to framing in the determination of how individuals make decisions amid uncertainty (e.g., Tversky & Kahneman, 1981); theorists of artificial intelligence have used frames to describe structures of information (Minsky, 1975); and scholars of media effects (e.g., Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Scheufele, 1999), political science (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007), and public policy (e.g., Schon & Rein, 1994) have used frames to better understand the nature and impact of political communication. Though not unrelated to these research traditions, framing as it is addressed in this paper belongs in the domain of social cognition, which pertains to how individuals process, store and use information from the social world (Hamilton, 2005).

Framing in the Cognitive Process

Several information-processing steps are believed to occur between the time an individual initially encounters stimulus information in the social environment and when he or she ultimately responds to it (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). The first step in this process involves selecting information from the environment for processing and takes the form of *attention*. In the workplace, individuals may direct their attention to information in the environment by participating in a department-wide survey of worker attitudes, listening to the explanation a supervisor provides for a policy, or opening and reading an e-mail

from a colleague, among other possible scenarios. Note that as described above, this information, though attended to by the perceiver, does not hold any particular meaning until it undergoes individual interpretation. This assignment of meaning to the stimulus information immediately follows the selection of information from the environment (Hamilton, 2005) and is the locus of *framing*. Following attention and interpretation of information from the stimulus environment, individuals elaborate on their interpretations by drawing inferences based on them (Bruner, 1957a; Heider, 1958). For example, an employee may be told that his company is enacting a hiring freeze and no new employees will be hired until the following fiscal year. Once the employee interprets this information, he may then *infer* that the company's financial health is less than sound and no new business plans will be put in motion in the immediate future. In the next step of the cognitive process, the employee would represent this information in his memory for later recall (Hamilton, 2005), such as when trying to determine if he should tell his supervisor about an innovative idea for a new product, given his inference about the company's financial well-being. Ultimately, attending to the company hiring freeze, interpreting its content, and inferring additional attributes about the message all influence the employee's decision about whether or not to promote his innovative idea. Such judgments, decisions, affective reactions, and behaviors are the end products of the cognitive process (Hamilton, 2005).

The Meaning of Meaning

The content of the "meaning" an individual assigns to stimulus information in the environment has evaluative and descriptive components (cf. Morris, 1946; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957), the latter of which takes place immediately following the

selection of information from the environment (James & James, 1989). During this meaning analysis (James & James, 1989), individuals engage stored mental representations or *schemata* to make sense of and describe the incoming information. Schemata are thought of as generic knowledge structures that tend to hold across repeated instantiations of similar stimuli (Fiske & Taylor, 1991), and the cognitive focus during this analysis is on determining if features of the stimuli information are consistent with the individual's schema for that information. Higgins and colleagues (Higgins, 1990; Higgins, Strauman, & Klein, 1986) refer to this initial step as *identification*, during which the perceiver relates the stimulus to a standard. The second component involved in the determination of meaning involves an individual's *valuation* of the stimulus information (Mandler, 1982). Valuation is an internally-oriented process in which individuals determine how much value they perceive in the stimuli (James & James, 1989), and Mandler (1982) differentiates the descriptive and evaluative components thusly:

Descriptive judgments seem to depend primarily on information that is “out there.” Evaluative judgments apparently do not. We may agree that “the tree is green” but we may argue whether “the tree is beautiful.” ...The value judgments seem to require something about “beautiful” that “belongs” to the speaker. (pp. 8-9)

This final observation about the evaluative meaning of information deriving from within the individual – and the tacit assumption that individuals differ along a variety of dimensions – is at the root of differential framing.

Schemata

James & Mazerolle (2002) state that “to frame an event is to place the event in an interpretative category” (p. 35) or a *cognitive schema*. Schemata are cognitive structures that (a) represent an individual’s knowledge about a particular concept, (b) develop through experience with other people, events, and situations, and (c) influence the processing of new information from the earliest moments of perception (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Researchers have explored how individuals use schemata to process information about the self (Markus, 1977); other individuals (e.g., Cantor & Mischel, 1979; Catrambone & Markus, 1987; Fong & Markus, 1982), commonplace events (e.g., Schank & Abelson, 1977), and the workplace (e.g., Lord & Foti, 1986). Schemata expedite cognitive processing by allowing individuals to draw on previously acquired (and stored) knowledge in the comprehension of new information (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). As conceptualized by James & Mazerolle (2002) in the framing process, schemata are “internal prisms through which external stimuli pass, and in passing they are translated into interpretative adjectives that indicate personal meaning” (p. 35). Thus, at the process level, framing is the deployment of knowledge structures acquired through experience to sort stimuli into categories of personal meaning to the perceiver.

Availability

For an individual to use a knowledge structure (i.e., a schema) to process information from the environment, at the very minimum the individual must be in possession of the knowledge. *Availability* refers to whether an individual has stored in memory a schema to be used in processing social input (Higgins & King, 1981; Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982). Consider how conditions related to availability may lead

individuals to assign different meanings to the same stimuli. For instance, an individual who has driven an automobile to work at a business park every day for 20 years likely has available a knowledge structure associated with employee parking. On the other hand, a person who has taken the train to an office in the city over the same 20-year period quite possibly does not have an available “parking” schema. Hence, when processing social input such as a company’s offer of free employee parking, the two individuals do not have the same schema available to interpret the information. As a result, the individuals – one with an available schema, the other without – assign different meanings to the same offer of free employee parking. A similar discrepancy would arise when two individuals have available to them schemata that pertain to a “meeting with the boss” but the contents of the schemata differ between the individuals. To the employee who knows only accolades and promotions, a “meeting with the boss” might be construed in favorable terms, while the employee who has been repeatedly reprimanded and demoted would interpret “meeting with the boss” quite differently. These examples illustrate how the availability of a schema is a necessary – but not sufficient – condition for an individual to use the schema in processing information from the social world (Higgins & King, 1981). However, for the schema to be used in the processing of information, an individual must also have access to the knowledge structure.

Accessibility

Bruner (1957b) first referred to *accessibility* as the ease with which a stored mental representation such as a schema is used to categorize or interpret stimulus information from the environment. Since then, Bruner’s description of the “perceptual readiness” of a schema or category has been refined to refer specifically to the potential

of the available knowledge to be *activated* (Higgins, 1996, 1999), allowing for the possibility that under certain conditions accessible schemata will be inappropriate for use. Where Kelly (1955) described *personal constructs* as relatively habitual ways different individuals use different categories to interpret their environments, Bruner focused on accessibility as a temporary result of goals. Unification of the paradigms and the research that followed them (e.g., Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982; Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977; Markus, 1977; Srull & Wyer, 1979) arrived when Bargh and colleagues formalized the distinction between temporary accessibility and chronic accessibility (Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986; Bargh, 1994). *Temporary accessibility* occurs when a schema has recently been activated or primed, such as when a supervisor's request for a meeting activates a knowledge structure for "meeting with the boss." *Chronic accessibility* refers to the high activation readiness of a schema or knowledge structure across a variety of situations, and such accessible schemata are less stimulus-dependent. For instance, a highly "opportunistic" person would have chronically accessible schemata that would contribute to processing multiple environments in terms of how they potentially might benefit the individual.

It is chronically accessible schemata that yield the framing proclivities described by James and Mazerolle (2002) as tendencies to use select adjectives to construe similar events. That is, individuals with strong dispositions to engage in certain behaviors rely on the same schemata to interpret attributes of the environment in terms where the behavioral response is one that is sensible, logical, and justified. These chronically accessible concepts operate at higher levels of readiness than non-chronic schemata (Bargh & Pratto, 1986), are used to interpret the behavior of others (Higgins, King, &

Mavin, 1982), and guide processing when information is vague (Higgins & Brendl, 1995; Lau, 1989). Additionally, repeated use of the same schema or construct contributes to it becoming a chronically accessible structure (Higgins & King, 1981), which means that the more the schema is used to interpret environmental stimuli the more readily it will be activated for future interpretations. Subsequently, social-information processing becomes relatively involuntary or *automatic*, and individuals come to interpret information with little effort or conscious awareness (see Bargh, 1994; Schneider & Shiffrin, 1977; Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977). This is how individuals with different motives to engage in different behaviors come to unconsciously interpret the same attributes of the environment in qualitatively different – but perfectly logical – ways: Over time, the needs to behave in a certain way and regard the behavior as logical and appropriate facilitate framing proclivities, which are based on the chronic accessibility of the relevant schemata. As will be further illustrated when the discussion turns to the traits of “achievement motivation” and “fear of failure,” the use of stored mental representations in the processing of environmental stimuli also is determined by the fit between the stimulus and relevant schema (Higgins, 1996). More detailed discussions of accessibility can be found elsewhere (e.g., Förster & Liberman, 2007; Higgins, 1996), but the impact of readily (and habitually) retrievable knowledge structures on differential framing is profound. Individuals with different chronically accessible schemata use different schemata to automatically interpret the very same event or attribute of the environment. As a result, the same stimulus means qualitatively different things to different people.

Differential Framing

When individuals assign qualitatively different meanings to the same stimulus, they do so to satisfy two related motives. The first motive is the individual's underlying predisposition to behave in a certain way. For example, a person with an aggressive disposition has an underlying need to behave aggressively and thus seeks outlet for this tendency. The concomitant motive is the desire to believe that the behavior evinced by the need is reasonable and logical, as opposed foolish or irrational (James, 1998). Thus, the aggressive person frames environmental stimuli in ways that permit the self-perception of aggressive acts as rational and logical responses. Indeed, the meaning or psychological significance stimulus information holds for individuals is determined by the degree to which the information justifies the motivated behavior (James & Mazerolle, 2002). In summary, the process is as follows: (1) An individual is motivated to engage in a particular behavior; (2) this motive is attended by a desire to perceive the behavior as a sensible adjustment to the environment; as a result, (3) stimulus information from the environment is interpreted in a way that facilitates both the expression of the motivated behavior and perception of motivated behavior as logical. Hence, individuals with different motives assign qualitatively different meanings to the same stimuli.

Justification Mechanisms

To satisfy the need to self-perceive their behavior as rational and appropriate, individuals rely on implicit reasoning biases to enhance the logical appeal of the behavior in which they are predisposed to engage (James, 1998; James & Mazerolle, 2002). Because these biases serve to justify the motivated behavior to the individual, James (1998) refers to these biases as *justification mechanisms* (JMs) and defines them as

“implicit biases whose purpose is to define, shape, and otherwise influence reasoning so as to enhance the rational appeal of behaving in a manner consistent with a disposition or motive” (James & Mazerolle, 2002, p. 38). James and Mazerolle (2002) described nine general categories of cognitive bias that yield *personality-specific* JMs, and differential framing represents both a broad category of cognitive bias and the foundation upon which personality-specific JMs are constructed. To illustrate, consider the *positive connotation of achievement striving* bias, one of six JMs James and Mazerolle outlined for individuals with the trait achievement motivation. The personality-specific bias is described as “a tendency to empathize with the sense of enthusiasm, intensity, and striving that characterizes those who succeed in demanding situations” (p. 41). The function of this bias, as that of all JMs, is to facilitate the perception of a disposition-related behaviors – in this case, achievement-oriented acts – as logical behavioral adjustments to the environment.

Differential framing forms the basis of the *positive connotation of achievement striving* bias in the following way: The immediate interpretation of an environmental attribute (e.g., a hardworking, ambitious supervisor) takes a form consistent with the achievement-oriented individual’s underlying motive to achieve. The actions of a supervisor who arrives at the office early and leaves late are likely to be interpreted favorably by an achievement-motivated individual, and the supervisor may be described as “driven,” “hard-working,” and “motivated.” The *positive connotation of achievement striving* bias permits the achievement-oriented individual to interpret the supervisor’s behavior and subsequently conclude that the behavior is logical (i.e., in accordance with a need or motive to achieve). On the other hand, an individual with the trait fear of failure

likely will rely on an opposite bias – *negative connotation of achievement striving* bias – to interpret the supervisor’s behavior in a manner consistent with the underlying motive. Hence, the behavior likely will be described as “obsessive,” “stress-inducing,” or “compulsive” (James & Mazerolle, 2002). This is how individuals with different latent motives come to assign qualitatively different meanings to the same stimulus information in the environment: Implicit biases are mapped onto consciousness in the form of adjectives individuals use to describe events or attributes in the environment (James & Mazerolle, 2002). This is how differential framing is likely to yield discrepant judgments, affective reactions, and behaviors.

The Motive-Trait Link

Cervone (1991) observed that the study of personality has progressed along two relatively distinct paths, the trait/dispositional approach and the social-cognitive approach. Researchers in the trait/dispositional tradition have concerned themselves with identifying a relatively simple structure of personality traits that account for individual differences in thought, emotion, and behavior (e.g., Allport & Odbert, 1936; Cattell, 1947; Costa & McCrae, 1985; Fiske, 1949; Goldberg, 1990; Tupes & Christal, 1961). This approach involves using natural language (e.g., conscientiousness, extraversion) to describe a taxonomy of personality dimensions along which individuals differ. Cervone refers to the alternate approach to the study of personality as the social-cognitive approach, and research in this domain concerns the cognitive structures and processes that give rise to what the layperson regards as “personality” (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Cervone, 2004; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Higgins, 1999; James, 1998; James & Mazerolle, 2002; Mischel, 1973; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). That is, the social-cognitive

approach to personality examines how “individuals assign personal meaning to events, plan courses of action, and regulate their motivation, emotion, and interpersonal behavior” (Cervone, 1991, p. 372). The goal of the social-cognitive approach is to explicate the mechanisms that account for the consistency, variability, and uniqueness of personality (Cervone, 2004). Both approaches pertain to differential framing, such that the social-cognitive process of assigning meaning to an environmental attribute leads to behavior indicative of a trait.

Motives and traits are conceptually distinct. *Motives* refer to individual desires or states of affair that people would like to bring about or prevent (Winter, John, Stewart, Klohnen, & Duncan, 1998). Motives (needs) underlie behavior. A *trait*, on the other hand, is a disposition or tendency to behave in a relatively consistent way across situations. Less cause than effect, “traits are comprised of more-or-less consistent, generalized, intercorrelated clusters of behaviors” (Winter et al., 1998, p. 233). James and Mazerolle (2002) outlined three principles of an emergent trait: (1) Related behaviors can be grouped into a general category; (2) the category is defined in terms of the behaviors; and (3) the eponymous behaviors consistently recur over time and situations. This dissertation will showcase how individuals with the motives to achieve and avoid failure will interpret the same environmental attribute differently because they are *motivated* to do so. Differential framing likely will then yield behaviors that come to be regarded as the traits achievement motivation and fear of failure, thus providing a useful account of a process that bridges the two fields of personality described by Cervone (1991).

The Motives to Achieve and Avoid Failure

Two Classes of Motives

Atkinson (1957) defined a *motive* as “a disposition to strive for a certain kind of satisfaction ... a capacity for satisfaction in the attainment of a certain class of incentives” (p. 360) and described two broad classes of motives in individuals. The first class of motives refers to *appetites* or *approach tendencies* and includes those motives that are instrumental in maximizing individual satisfaction. For example, the achievement motive is conceived as a tendency to strive for (i.e., approach) success. The second set of motives are those that compel a person to avoid pain. Atkinson classified these motives as *aversions* or *avoidant tendencies*, and they indicate an individual’s capacity to experience pain as it relates to certain negative outcomes. He cites as an example the motive to avoid failure as “a disposition to avoid failure and/or a capacity for experiencing shame and humiliation as a consequence of failure” (p. 360). Both approach and avoidant tendencies are linked to the valences the outcomes hold for the individual, and the roots of the classes of motives can be traced to the ancient Greek philosophy of ethical hedonism, which espoused the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain (see Elliot, 1999; Elliot & Covington, 2001).

When faced with a situation in which their performance will be evaluated according to some standard, individuals are presumed to have a *motive to achieve* and a *motive to avoid failure* (Atkinson, 1978). In such evocative situations, the motives generate opposite behaviors: The motive to achieve involves approaching and undertaking the activity, and the motive to avoid failure engenders a desire to withdraw and not undertake the activity. For their function in guiding behavior, Atkinson (1978)

refers to these respective tendencies as *excitatory* and *inhibitory* tendencies, and the conflict between them is resolved through the “resultant achievement-oriented tendency” or *resultant tendency*. That is, the two tendencies combine additively, and the degree to which the motive to achieve and the motive avoid failure are discrepant within the individual represents what Atkinson calls the “final strength of tendency” (p. 18). This final strength of tendency is reflected, ultimately, in whether an individual chooses to approach or avoid a task upon which their performance will be evaluated. Individuals who consistently come to approach such tasks are said to demonstrate the trait achievement motivation, while those who recurrently respond to such situations by avoiding them are characterized by the trait fear of failure (James & Mazerolle, 2002).

The Motive to Achieve

Among the list of human needs for emotional and mental satisfaction that Murray (1938) proffered was the need for achievement (*n Achievement* or *n Ach*), which the author conceptualized as one component of a higher-order need for superiority. Need for achievement was described as a need “to overcome obstacles, to exercise power, to strive to do something difficult as well and as quickly as possible” (pp. 80-81). Consistent with the rest of this paper, *need* and *motive* will be used fairly interchangeably to represent a force energizing, directing, and sustaining behavior (see Jones, 1955; Murray, 1938). Thus, in Murray’s theory individuals have a capacity for attaining satisfaction through the accomplishment and mastery of difficult tasks, and some scholars argue that proving one’s competence is at the root of the motive to achieve (e.g., Elliot & Dweck, 2005). McClelland and colleagues suggested that the satisfaction or “affective arousal” obtained in such pursuits was, in part, determined by the standards to which the individual

performing the task was evaluated (McClelland et al., 1953). The criterion by which an individual perceives his or her achievement (i.e., satisfies his or her need for achievement) may be determined internally (i.e., “This is better than I have ever done”) or externally (i.e., “This is better than most people have done”), and accordingly may or may not involve direct competition with other individuals (Spence & Helmreich, 1983). Individuals with the need to achieve are driven by a desire to demonstrate a capability in accomplishing challenging tasks (McClelland, 1985). This intrinsic motivation (Spence & Helmreich, 1983) pertains to the sheer enjoyment individuals experience in striving toward excellence and the mastery of challenging tasks (cf. Dweck & Elliott, 1983; Nicholls, 1984). As McClelland put it:

What should be involved in the achievement motive is doing something better *for its own sake*, for the intrinsic satisfaction of doing something better. (p. 228)

As others have observed (e.g., Atkinson, 1978; James & Mazerolle, 2002; Spence & Helmreich, 1983), external rewards that may attend successful accomplishment of challenging tasks are not unrelated to the need to achieve, but they are seen as peripheral to intrinsic motivation. Individuals with a high need to achieve feel personally responsible for their performance, are desirous of performance feedback, and tend to become restless with less-than-challenging tasks (McClelland, 1985).

It bears repeating that an approach orientation such as the motive to achieve must be activated by stimulus information in the environment. As described by Atkinson (1957), it is “presumed to be latent until aroused by situation cues which indicate that some performance will be instrumental to achievement” (p. 359). James and colleagues

refer to such cues as “high-pressure-for-achievement” tasks (James & Mazerolle, 2002) or, simply, achievement-oriented objectives:

An achievement-oriented goal is one that (a) relative to one’s skill and ability, is personally challenging or demanding, (b) requires intense and persistent effort to attain, and (c) is perceived by the individual as an important and worthwhile accomplishment. (James & Rentsch, 2004, pp. 229-230)

For individuals with a strong need to achieve, such situations arouse the motive and compel them to approach the task, devote considerable time and energy to accomplishing it, and persist until the objective is realized. An individual with a strong need to achieve is driven by a desire to show that he or she is capable of accomplishing a challenging task, particularly one whose probability for success is .30 to .50 (McClelland, 1985). For the situation to truly be evocative of the motive, individuals must be free to make the choice to approach or avoid the task, and the task must be personally meaningful to them (see James & Mazerolle, 2002; McClelland, 1985). Examples of such freely made, personally meaningful decisions include whether to attempt a difficult major in college, commit long hours in the pursuit of expertise, or strive for a promotion at work.

James and colleagues (1998; James & Mazerolle, 2002; James & Rentsch, 2004) have identified six JMs instrumental in facilitating the behavior that comes to be known as achievement motivation (see Appendix A for JMs associated with achievement motivation). To illustrate how JMs and differential framing link motives to behavior, consider, for example, the *opportunity bias* described by James and Mazerolle as “a tendency to frame demanding tasks on which success is uncertain as ‘challenges’ that offer ‘opportunities’ to demonstrate present skills, to learn new skills, and to make a

contribution” (p. 41) (see Spence & Helmreich, 1983). Imagine a scenario where an analyst with a strong motive to achieve is approached by a colleague and asked if she has time to perform a series of complex analyses on an incomplete and confusing set of data. Nothing would compel the analyst to perform the task, and she could accept or decline without consequence. However, for the analyst with a strong motive to achieve, the opportunity bias would guide her interpretation (i.e., framing) of the task, and she would likely regard such a project as an “opportunity” or “challenge” because to assign such meaning would be consistent with her underlying motive to challenge herself, demonstrate her skills, and make a contribution. Subsequently (and *ceteris paribus*), the analyst would approach the project proposed by the colleague (or similar tasks), demonstrating a stable disposition to approach “challenges” and “opportunities” that could be summarized as the “trait achievement motivation.” As will be seen when the discussion turns to the need to avoid failure, an individual without a strong motive to avoid failure will rely on a different bias in interpreting the request from the colleague and *differentially frame* the request. In either case, the recurrent influence of a specific set of implicit biases on the interpretation of similar achievement-oriented tasks will increase the likelihood that the knowledge structures used in the processing of the tasks will become chronically accessible (Higgins & King, 1981). That is, the analyst with the motive to achieve will express a *framing proclivity* to consistently appraise demanding tasks as worthwhile challenges and opportunities.

The Motive to Avoid Failure

Contemporary rendering of something akin to a motive to avoid failure can be traced to Murray (1938), who described a “need for infavoidance” (*n Inf*) as an

individual's need to avoid humiliation or "conditions which may lead to belittlement" (p. 192). In the Murryan lexicon, *n Inf* referred to a psychological need to not feel inferior. Such a feeling attends attempting a challenging or achievement-oriented task, failing, and experiencing feelings of incompetence and shame. Within his discussion of *n Inf*, Murray used the phrase "fear of failure" to describe a causal mechanism that compels a person to avoid a task where failure could possibly ensue, and this pairing has persisted over the years. However, less than the fear of not accomplishing a task, the fear of failure really pertains to a motive to avoid experiencing humiliation and shame associated with failure (Atkinson, 1957). Notable is what the experience of shame represents to an individual, as this state is what he or she is compelled to avoid – to the point of not attempting a task at which he or she may or may not succeed. Shame is a "condition of humiliating disgrace or disrepute" (*Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*) and is linked to how the self is perceived by others. Shame is tied to strong feelings of inferiority and submissiveness, increased self-consciousness, and hiding behaviors (Andrews, 1995). Thus, an individual with a strong motive to avoid failure is compelled to avoid achievement-oriented tasks because of anxiety and apprehension about feeling humiliated and inferior.

Individuals with strong needs to avoid failure engage implicit biases to enhance the logical appeal of behavior to which they are predisposed. These justification mechanisms (JMs) and the differential framing to which they are linked mediate the relationship between the motive to avoid failure and the behaviors that come to represent the trait fear of failure. James and colleagues (1998; James & Mazerolle, 2002; James & Rentsch, 2004) have identified eight JMs that enhance the logical appeal of behavior that satisfies a strong need to avoid failure (see Appendix B). These JMs function in the same

manner as those for achievement motivation, thus the explication of their operation will be brief. One such JM of individuals with a strong motive to avoid failure is the *liability inclination*, which involves a tendency to interpret demanding tasks as threats or in terms of the liabilities they present. For instance, if the data analyst approached by a colleague for assistance with a challenging data set were to have a strong motive to avoid failure, she likely would be guided by the consideration of all that could go wrong in undertaking the project (and how such occurrences would affect her). As a result of this liability bias, the analyst would be inclined to frame the colleague's request as a "can't-win situation," a "black hole," or a "risky proposition" and decline the request to help. Compare this framing to that of the analyst with a strong motive to achieve, who would be inclined to interpret the assistance request as an "opportunity" or "challenge." Both interpretations are perfectly logical to the individual assigning the meaning, yet the meanings assigned to the request are qualitatively different. The differential framing permits each individual to engage in the predisposed behavior while regarding it as a logical action.

Evidence of Differential Interpretation

Differential framing represents fertile ground for organizational researchers, and a primary goal of this dissertation is to highlight its potential utility. However, evidence from the literature suggests an awareness of the discrepant ways individuals may interpret the same stimulus information in the environment. For instance, in the negotiation literature, Pinkley (1990; Pinkley & Northcraft, 1994) has empirically identified *conflict frames* that individuals involved in disputes employ to interpret the conflicts in which they are engaged. Conflict frames essentially are schemata for conflict, and Pinkley (1990) found that different individuals focus on or assign meaning to different aspects of

a conflict. Outcomes such as satisfaction with the negotiation and anticipated future relationship with disputant were associated with the type of conflict frame employed by the disputant (Pinkley & Northcraft, 1994). Also, perhaps unsurprisingly, conflict mediators frame disputes in less polarizing terms than disputants in conflict (Pinkley, 1990), and perceptions of salary “fairness” have differed as a function of negotiating position (Thompson & Loewenstein, 1992). Additionally, the same organizational events have been interpreted differently by individuals in different workgroups, and members of the same workgroup have interpreted the same events in a similar fashion (Rentsch, 1990). In her elucidation of “meaning subcultures” within organizations, Rentsch (1990) used multidimensional scaling to quantitatively describe the qualitatively different meanings individuals assign to organizational events and urged future researchers to pay heed to the meanings imputed by employees and survey respondents, as opposed to those presumed by researchers:

Respondents may agree that managers are willing to take chances on good ideas, but some may interpret this statement as reflecting risk, and others may interpret it as aggressive, short-sighted, or professional. (p. 669)

Though they pertain to situational factors that predict discrepant interpretations of the same stimuli, these findings bolster the case for the use of differential framing as a means to strengthen measurement and capture additional variance within work-related psychology.

The most direct test of differential framing to date was reported in a dissertation by LeBreton (2002). In that study, the author created the Differential Framing Test to assess implicit cognitions associated with dispositional aggression (James & Mazerolle,

2002; James & McIntyre, 1996). LeBreton's initial measure was comprised of 41 words and their possible synonyms; his goal was to determine if the same word literally meant different things to different individuals. Each item of the measure consisted of a stimulus word and four possible answers, and participants were instructed to choose the word that most closely matched the stimulus word in meaning. Stimulus words (e.g., COMMANDER, TRUSTING, TIMID) were selected for the presumed evocative appeal they would hold for aggressive individuals (i.e., the words would activate implicit cognitive biases associated with aggression). Following the stimulus words were four ostensibly synonymous words, though in reality only two of the words could be construed as synonymous. One of the response options was indicative of aggressive framing, and a second response option represented non-aggressive framing. The third and fourth response options were not true synonyms and were not likely to be selected by participants, thus compelling an aggressive or non-aggressive response. For example, for the stimulus word TIMID, the four potential synonyms were COWARDLY, SHY, FOOLISH, and PEACEFUL. A person with an aggressive disposition would likely select COWARDLY as most synonymous with TIMID, while a non-aggressive person would be implicitly biased to selecting SHY as a synonym. FOOLISH and PEACEFUL should not be selected because neither is a worthy synonym for the stimulus word. Scoring was as follows: An aggressive response was scored 1, a non-aggressive response scored -1, and selection of a non-synonymous response was coded 0.

Using two samples of undergraduates, LeBreton (2002) empirically keyed the items against a criterion of student conduct violations recorded by the university while acknowledging the imperfect nature of the criterion (i.e., not all violations are likely to be

aggressive acts). Items that correlated .30 or better were retained, resulting in a unit-weighted composite scale composed of five items for the first sample, and a unit-weighted composite scale of eight items for the second sample. The five-item scale correlated .45 with the criterion, and the eight-item scale correlated .74 in the respective samples. LeBreton then cross-validated the keys with the alternative samples, obtaining an average cross-validity of .43. LeBreton also reported several significant correlations of the Differential Framing Test with subscales of another conditional reasoning measure designed to assess justification mechanisms associated with aggressive behavior. Additionally, the Differential Framing Test did not correlate with self-report measures of aggressive behavior, consistent with the notion that biases that underlie differential framing are indeed implicit. As an initial step in the measurement of differential framing, LeBreton's study provides further evidence that different individuals assign different meaning to the same stimulus.

Organizational Culture

At the heart of an organization's culture are its *values*, a set of normative beliefs that have been internalized by employees and potentially guide their behavior (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). From these values come behavioral prescriptions or norms, and the shared norms, values, and assumptions within an organization may be described as its *culture* (Schein, 1996). Organizations often derive their cultures from their founders and leaders, who transmit the preferred values, norms, and assumptions to employees throughout the enterprise. Such a top-down conceptualization of organizational culture led one researcher to conclude that the culture of an organization may be thought of as the beliefs individual employees hold about what upper management believes and values

(Schneider, 2000; Schneider, Brief, & Guzzo, 1996). Early research adopted a sociological or anthropological bent, with researchers examining organizational practices for their symbolism and imagery (e.g., Pettigrew, 1979; Pfeffer, 1981; Trice & Beyer, 1984) and conducting qualitative studies (e.g., Smircich, 1983). Other researchers reacted to the inherent challenges posed by conducting large-scale (i.e., organization-wide) qualitative research and began to develop quantitative measures of organizational culture (e.g., Cooke & Rousseau, 1988). The primary intent of quantitative researcher was to assess the direction and intensity of organizational culture. The *direction* of a culture refers to its actual content; it is largely represented by values and behavioral norms, “how things are done” in the organization. The *intensity* of an organization’s culture refers to its actual strength or pervasiveness and is a function of employee agreement on the direction of culture as well as the connection between expectations, behaviors, and rewards in the organization (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; see also Trice & Beyer, 1984).

Strong Culture

A strong organizational culture is one in which employees intensely express approval or disapproval with their coworkers’ behavior relative to the norms, and one in which agreement on norms and values is widespread throughout the organization (O’Reilly, 1989). In part due to the influence of non-academic literature (e.g., Peters & Waterman, 1982), a strong organizational culture has been thought to compel organizational effectiveness. However, Martin (1995; see also Denison & Mishra, 1996) described such a relationship as a “myth,” and other researchers have concluded – for a variety of reasons – that little in the literature supports a link between organizational culture and performance (Wilderom, Glunk, & Maslowski, 2000). One possible reason

for such a disconnect could be that employees who hold similar beliefs about the culture of their organization (i.e., a strong culture) have discrepant impressions of what that culture actually means to them. That is, Employee A and Employee B may agree that the culture at their workplace is a “results-oriented” one, but they may have vastly different interpretations of what “results-oriented” means. Perhaps Employee A has a personality that predisposes her to thrive and add significant value in a results-oriented workplace, while Employee B has a personality ill-equipped to function at a high level in a results-oriented environment. Differential framing represents a potential avenue to determine if, indeed, agreement on aspects of culture equates to similar meanings assigned to the culture.

Differential Framing and Organizational Culture

Cultures based on several scales from the widely used Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI; Cooke & Lafferty, 1983, 1984, 1986; Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; Cooke & Szumal, 2000) were developed to demonstrate how differential framing may have implications for the study of organizational culture. The OCI is composed of 120 statements that describe a behavior or personal style that might be expected of employees in organizations. Sample statements include “point out flaws” and “question decisions made by others,” and respondents are asked to indicate to what extent employees in their organizations are expected to engage in the behavior in order to “fit in” and meet expectations.

Four of the 12 scales of the OCI selected to test the operation of differential framing were chosen for their perceived likelihood to evoke the latent motives to achieve and avoid failure. Elements of both the *perfectionistic* and *achievement* cultures were

expected to appeal to individuals dominated by the motive to achieve (AM); the same features likely would not appeal to individuals dominated by the motive to avoid failure (FF). Additionally, it was expected that AMs and FFs would differentially interpret aspects of *conventional* and *dependent* cultures, with FFs embracing such cultures and AMs finding them off-putting. Perhaps just as important in the elucidation of differential framing is the selection of a cultural style that will *not* arouse the latent motives, and which likely will be similarly interpreted by AMs and FFs. Toward that end, the *affiliative* culture has been selected for discussion.

Perfectionistic and Achievement Cultures

The perfectionistic and achievement cultures are believed to possess characteristics that will attract AMs and repel FFs. The perfectionistic culture is characterized by the attainment of high standards, investment of long hours to accomplish tasks, and impeccable deliverables (Cooke & Szumal, 2000). Individuals in such environments place strenuous demands on themselves and others, are meticulous about details, and may be indifferent toward the feelings and needs of their coworkers. The achievement culture is reflective of employees who set and vigorously pursue challenging goals; employees in such a culture enthusiastically strive for excellence and value doing things as well as can be done. Thus, it seems likely that AMs and FFs, if in a similar culture of suitable intensity, could agree on the nature of the culture (i.e., it is hard-driving and goal-oriented). It also seems likely that the same culture could be interpreted differently according to the latent motives of AMs and FFs. Though not an exact replica of an achievement-oriented or high-pressure-for-achievement task, such a culture is expected to be suitably evocative of the motives to achieve and avoid failure.

Thus, it is predicted that AMs will employ justification mechanisms (JMs) that facilitate their interpretation of the description in a manner consistent with their underlying motive to approach, persist at, and accomplish demanding tasks. Conversely, FFs are expected to engage JMs that permit them to avoid demanding tasks out of a self-protective interest in avoiding the shame and humiliation that may attend failure – and to regard such an action as a logical one. This reasoning forms the basis of the first propositions of this dissertation:

H₁: Individuals characterized by the motive to achieve and those characterized by the need to avoid failure will assign qualitatively different meanings to a culture composed of perfectionistic and achievement elements.

H₂: Individuals characterized by the motive to achieve and those characterized by the need to avoid failure will not differ in their assessment of the intensity of a culture composed of perfectionistic and achievement elements.

Were the predictions to be supported, it could be said that while AMs and FFs agree on the strength of a culture, they interpret the content in qualitatively different terms. That is, they differentially frame it.

Conventional and Dependent Cultures

The conventional and dependent cultures are believed to be comprised of elements that FFs may find attractive and AMs will find distasteful. Tradition and an adherence to long-standing policy are highly valued in a conventional culture, described by Cooke and Rousseau (1988) as “conservative, traditional, and bureaucratically controlled” (p. 258). As such, a conventional culture is characterized by rule following and conformity, and value is placed on “fitting in.” Similarly, a dependent culture is one

that is strongly hierarchical and characterized by centralized decision making. Dependent cultures feature relatively little participative decision making, and employees have clear expectations and little latitude in carrying out their tasks. Here, too, it is reasonable to suppose seems likely that FFs and AMs, if in an environment similar to that of conventional and dependent cultures, could agree on the strength of the culture (i.e., it is hierarchical and tradition-bound). Additionally, the same culture could quite possibly be interpreted differently according to the latent motives of FFs and AMs; FFs likely will find the culture to be safe and risk-free, and AMs likely will see it as stifling and controlling. This reasoning underlies the second set of propositions in this dissertation:

H₃: Individuals characterized by the motive to achieve and those characterized by the need to avoid failure will assign qualitatively different meanings to a culture composed of perfectionistic and achievement elements.

H₄: Individuals characterized by the motive to achieve and those characterized by the need to avoid failure will not differ in their assessment of the intensity of a culture composed of conventional and dependent elements.

Were the predictions to be supported, it could again be said that AMs and FFs agree on the strength of a culture yet disagree on what the culture actually means.

Affiliative Culture

An affiliative culture is one characterized by friendliness, cooperation and inclusion among employees (Cooke & Szumal, 2000). Employees are encouraged to maintain constructive and pleasant personal relationships, and to be sensitive to the well-being of their coworkers. Camaraderie and interpersonal consideration are the orders of the day in an affiliative culture. Representative items from this scale of the OCI ask

employees the extent to which they are expected to “deal with others in a friendly way” and “share” their feelings and thoughts to fit in and meet expectations. As it was hypothesized that AMs and FFs may agree on the strength of a other cultures of appropriate intensity, so too is it expected that they will agree on strength of an affiliative culture. However, contrary to the differential framing predicted of AMs and FFs earlier, it is expected that both groups will interpret an affiliative culture in a *similar* fashion. That is, the affiliative culture is not expected to arouse the motives to achieve and avoid failure, and interpretation of the culture will not be guided by differential framing. Thus, additional hypotheses of this dissertation pertain to a lack of differential framing of affiliative cultures:

H₅: Individuals characterized by the motive to achieve and those characterized by the need to avoid failure will not assign qualitatively different meanings to an affiliative culture.

H₆: Individuals characterized by the motive to achieve and those characterized by the need to avoid failure will not differ in their assessment of the intensity of an affiliative culture.

Summary – Hypotheses

The principal goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate that individuals compelled by contrasting motives will assign qualitatively different meanings to the same environmental stimuli. Several types of organizational cultures have been selected to illustrate the phenomenon of differential framing, and the predictions associated with each are briefly recapitulated here. First, cultures characterized by strenuous demands, long hours, and the pursuit of lofty goals are expected to be favorably interpreted by AMs

and unfavorably by FFs. Second, it is expected that FFs will favorably interpret cultures descriptive of “fitting in” and adhering to policy, while AMs are expected to negatively interpret such cultures. Differential framing is expected to occur in the preceding scenarios because the cultures should evoke the contrasting motives and yield interpretations consistent with individuals’ latent dispositions. Finally, when assessing cultures characterized by friendliness and warmth, AMs and FFs are not expected to differ in their interpretations because the motives should not be evoked. Clarifying the circumstances in which individuals may agree on the strength of their organizational culture but differentially interpret the meaning of it should be of substantial value to researchers probing the link between culture and organizational effectiveness.

CHAPTER 2

THE PRESENT STUDY

Participants

Considering the relatively novel phenomenon under investigation in this study, two samples from different universities were used in an attempt to strengthen confidence in the findings. Notable differences in the samples include a high proportion (79%) of females in Sample 2 and elevated mean ACT scores at the Sample 1 university. Sample 2 also was slightly older and had more age variance among its participants, while nearly one quarter of Sample 1 described themselves as of Asian descent. Further details are provided below.

Sample 1

Ninety-two females and 81 males about 19 years old ($M = 19.46$, $SD = 1.3$) made up Sample 1. Participants were undergraduates at a public research university in the Southeastern United States and participated in exchange for extra credit in a psychology course. Sample 1 was mostly White (67%) or of Asian descent (24%). The 2008 freshman class at the Sample 1 university had an approximate mean ACT score of 31, nearly 10 points above the national mean (ACT, 2009). The highest score an individual can obtain on the ACT is a 36.

Sample 2

Seventy females and 19 males about 21 years old ($M = 21.03$, $SD = 4.48$) comprised Sample 2. Participants were undergraduates at a public university in the Southeastern United States and participated in exchange for extra credit in a psychology

course. Sample 2 was mostly White (75%) or African-American (15%). The 2008 freshman class at the Sample 2 university had an approximate mean ACT score of 25, nearly four points above the national mean (ACT, 2009).

Measures

Conditional Reasoning Test-Relative Motive Strength

The Conditional Reasoning Test-Relative Motive Strength (CRT-RMS) (James, 1998) was used to assess the independent variables of this study, the motives to achieve and avoid failure. The CRT-RMS is an implicit measure designed to assess the degree to which the motives predominate in an individual. It is composed of 16 reasoning problems, 15 of which are constructed to tap justification mechanisms (JMs) associated with achievement motivation (AM) and fear of failure (FF). The CRT-RMS is billed to participants as a reasoning test, suggesting that there is a “correct” answer among the five multiple-choice response options for each item. The item stems present scenarios and ask participants to infer the answer most consistent with the information provided. At least one of the five response options for each item are logically invalid responses, leaving participants to choose among responses indicative of JMs for achievement motivation and fear of failure. The AM and FF responses are perfectly logical responses whose selection will depend on the implicit bias that guides the respondent. Each AM response is scored a +1, each FF response is scored -1, and other responses are scored 0. Scores are summed to yield an overall score suggestive of the degree to which an individual is dominated by one motive or the other, and most people have a dominant need or at least a tendency to favor one of the two needs (James, 1998). Data published by James and

colleagues (1998; James & Rentsch, 2004) attest to the efficacy of the CRT-RMS as a predictive tool.

Culture Descriptions

To assess the dependent variables of this study, descriptions of 19 organizational cultures were developed by the author. Eight of the cultures (i.e., AM cultures) were designed to appeal to individuals dominated by the motive to achieve, eight were crafted to appeal to individuals dominated by the motive to avoid failure (i.e., FF cultures), and three cultures were written specifically to *not* evoke the motives to achieve and avoid failure. Additionally, two distractor cultures were included in the scale but not the analyses. The AM cultures were based on the achievement and perfectionistic cultures described by Cooke and colleagues, and the FF cultures were based on the conventional and dependent cultures; each was theoretically designed to tap the justification mechanisms associated with the motives to achieve and avoid failure. Culture descriptions were reviewed and revised in concert with the author's advisor, the chief theorist behind the concept of differential framing (i.e., James), and three graduate students in the Laboratory of Innovative Assessment and Personality at the Georgia Institute of Technology. A representative AM item is as follows:

Working on a variety of challenging projects simultaneously is the norm for Company G employees, who stand out by pushing themselves to consistently improve. Work at Company G is fast-paced and offers employees a constant opportunity to develop and demonstrate new skills in the workplace. Employees do not waste time, and the most valued employees are those who consistently surpass what it is expected of them.

Following each culture description, participants were asked to select which of four adjectives best describes the culture. Consistent with methodology designed by James and colleagues (James & Mazerolle, 2002; James & McIntyre, 1996; LeBreton, 2002), one adjective is designed to appeal to AMs, one is designed to appeal to FFs, and the two other options are illogical options and should not be selected. For instance, following the description of the preceding Company G, participants chose among DRIVEN, OBSESSIVE, ACCIDENTAL, and OPINIONATED. It was predicted that AM participants would describe the culture of Company G as driven, and FF participants would interpret such an operating environment as obsessive. Neither ACCIDENTAL nor OPINIONATED should be selected because they are not really logical descriptions of the culture at Company G (see Appendix C for all culture descriptions used in this study). AM responses were coded +1, FF responses coded -1, and illogical responses were coded 0. To determine the “strength” of the culture, participants were asked after each description to indicate to what extent an employee would have to work long hours and meet exacting demands to “fit in” and meet expectations at the company described. Response options were along a 5-point, Likert-type scale ranging from NOT AT ALL to TO A VERY GREAT EXTENT.

In addition to the 16 cultures designed to appeal to AMs or FFs, participants evaluated three other cultures based on the affiliative culture described by Cooke and Rousseau (1988). These cultures should not theoretically elicit the motives to achieve and avoid failure as they do not directly involve high-pressure-for-achievement tasks. Each of these culture descriptions was followed by four adjectives potentially descriptive of the culture: one of the adjectives was a slightly positive word (e.g., PLEASANT); another

was slightly negative (e.g., UNAPPEALING); and the remaining two were illogical and not meant to be selected (e.g., VOLUNTARY). Each of these descriptions also was followed by a question about the extent to which an employee would need to engage in certain behaviors to “fit in” and meet expectations (e.g., participants were asked the degree to which an employee would have to “deal with coworkers in a friendly way”).

Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire and Test Anxiety Scale

Two additional measures that did not bear directly on the hypotheses were included in this study. The 19-item Work and Family Orientation (WOFO) Questionnaire (Spence & Helmreich, 1983) and a 20-item version of the Test Anxiety Scale (TAS) (Sarason, 1978) were used to assess participants’ explicit (i.e., self-reported) achievement motivation and fear of failure, respectively. A representative WOFO item is “I find satisfaction in working as well as I can,” while a sample item from the TAS is “During tests I find myself thinking of the consequences of failing.” Participants respond to items on each measure by agreeing with the statements along a five-point, Likert-type scale. Though often scored by asking participants to agree TRUE or FALSE with the each statement and summing the responses, scores on the TAS were not dichotomized because dividing a continuous dimension into categories may decrease relationships between measured variables and reduce power (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Analyses on these established measures were exploratory in nature and focused on the degree to which differential framing involved latent (i.e., largely unconscious and inaccessible to the individual) motives.

Procedure

This study was conducted online via a secure Web site. Individuals who signed up to participate at their universities were issued a link to the secure site, whereupon they evaluated each of the culture descriptions and completed the CRT-RMS, WOFO, and TAS. Participants also provided demographic data and were awarded extra credit in exchange for their participation.

Results

Reliabilities

To estimate internal-consistency reliability of the CRT-RMS and participant responses to the culture descriptions, a variation of the KR-20 was computed (see James, 2001; LeBreton, 2002). This formula uses item-total polyserial correlation coefficients and is reproduced below.

$$r = \frac{K}{K-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum s_i^2}{\sum (r_i s_i)^2} \right)$$

K represents the number of items in the scale, s_i^2 refers to the variance of the items, and $r_i s_i$ represents the product of the item-total polyserial coefficient and standard deviation of the item. Consistent with James (2001) and LeBreton (2002), standardized variables were assumed and variances were set to unity. As a result, the following computational formula was used to compute internal-consistency reliabilities for the CRT-RMS and participant responses to the culture descriptions:

$$r = \frac{K}{K-1} \left(1 - \frac{K}{(\sum r_i)^2} \right)$$

Internal-consistency reliabilities are shown in Table 1. Though slightly modest, the CRT-RMS reliabilities are not totally unexpected given the three-factor structure of the measure reported by James (1998). The eight culture items designed to appeal to AMs and repel FFs demonstrated suitable internal consistency, particularly for an inchoate scale (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), as did the eight cultures that were designed to appeal to FFs and repel AMs. Reliability was not computed for the three affiliative cultures not believed to reflect a high-pressure-for-achievement task, however the three items had an average inter-item correlation of .68. The internal consistency of the WOFO likely reflects its multidimensional nature, and the TAS demonstrated sound internal-consistency reliability.

Table 1. Internal-Consistency Reliability of Measures

| | Sample 1 | Sample 2 |
|--------------------|----------|----------|
| CRT-RMS | 0.59 | 0.56 |
| AM Scale (8 items) | 0.78 | 0.78 |
| FF Scale (8 items) | 0.83 | 0.86 |
| WOFO | 0.76 | 0.69 |
| TAS | 0.90 | 0.80 |

Note: CRT-RMS = Conditional Reasoning Test-Relative Motive Strength; AM Scale = Culture scale designed to appeal to motive to achieve; FF Scale = Culture scale designed to appeal to motive to avoid failure. WOFO = Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire (AM self-report); TAS = Test Anxiety Scale (FF self-report). *N* = 173 for Sample 1; *N* = 89 for Sample 2.

AM Cultures

A unit-weighted composite scale was derived from participant responses to the eight AM cultures and is referred to as AM Scale. Polychoric correlations between the

AM Scale and the CRT-RMS were computed (See Table 2) because scores on each are believed to be categorical indicators of continuous latent constructs. Differential framing of the cultures would be evident if scores on the CRT-RMS and AM Scale were associated with one another, but among Sample 1 participants this prediction was not supported. No relationship between the CRT-RMS and AM Scale emerged in Sample 1 ($r = .06$), and in the smaller Sample 2 the association was of greater magnitude ($r = .14$) but still indistinct from zero. Additionally, the self-report measure of achievement motivation (i.e., the WOFO) did not predict scores on the AM Scale in Sample 1 ($r = .08$). However, in Sample 2, scores on the explicit measure did predict participant evaluations of the AM cultures ($r = .23, p < .05$). This finding, though not formally predicted, is noteworthy because it provides a tenuous link between achievement orientation and the interpretation of achievement-related organizational cultures. Though the AM Scale is composed of items essentially gaining initial tryout, the lack of relationship between the scale and the CRT-RMS is surprising. Several possible reasons for this discovery will be discussed in the next part of this paper.

To assess the degree to which they felt certain types of behaviors were required to fit in at the workplaces described in the AM Scale (i.e., the strength of the cultures), participants responded to eight items that asked, for instance, the extent to which employees would have to “embrace challenges” to meet expectations at the organizations. Responses were made along a five-point, Likert-type scale, with greater values indicative of a “stronger” culture, and a unit-weighted composite scale was created from these responses. The mean for this AM Strength Scale (3.99, $SD = .50$) in Sample 1 suggests that participants interpreted the AM cultures as considerably strong, a finding edified by

participants in Sample 2 ($M = 4.01$, $SD = .05$). Contrary to the expectation that AMs and FFs would equally appraise the strength of an organization's culture, however, scores on this AM Strength Scale were associated with scores on the CRT-RMS in Sample 1 ($r = .23$, $p < .01$), such that individuals characterized by the implicit motive to achieve were more attuned to the behaviors necessary to fit in and adhere to an achievement-oriented culture. Though this finding did not obtain in Sample 2 ($r = .14$, $p = ns$), the Sample 1 result is perhaps logical in retrospect considering the schemata likely accessible to AMs in processing such cultures (e.g., Bargh & Pratto, 1986; Feldman, 1999; Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982). That is, AMs are attuned to environments that facilitate the expression of their motives.

FF Cultures

Scoring of the eight culture descriptions believed to appeal to FFs and repel AMs was identical to the above protocol, except FF responses were coded +1, AM responses were coded -1, and illogical responses were coded 0; polychoric correlations between the FF Scale and the CRT-RMS were computed based on the same theoretical rationale. Differential framing of the cultures would be evident if scores on the CRT-RMS and FF Scale were negatively related to one another, and in Sample 2 the implicit measure of the motive to achieve correlated $-.21$ with the FF Scale ($p = .05$), suggesting that the cultures held qualitatively different meanings for participants characterized by contrasting motives. Additionally, the FF Scale had a significant negative relationship with the WOFO ($r = -.30$, $p < .01$), the explicit measure of achievement motivation, indicating that as participants' favorable evaluations of FF cultures increased their scores on a self-report measure of achievement motivation declined. Favorable impressions of FF cultures also

tended to increase with elevated scores on the TAS self-report measure of fear of failure ($r = .20, p = .06$). In contrast to the association between the FF Scale and CRT-RMS in Sample 2, no such relationship was found in Sample 1.

The FF Strength Scale was created in the same fashion as the AM Strength Scale, the only exception being that participants were asked the degree to which employees would have to, for example, “do things as they’ve always been done” to fit in at the described organizations. Participants in both samples perceived the FF cultures as less strong than the AM cultures, and the FF cultures in Sample 1 ($M = 3.11, SD = .74$) were determined to be stronger than those in Sample 2 ($M = 2.78, SD = .70$), $t(260) = 3.45, p < .01$. As with the AM Strength Scale, elevated scores were indicative of a “stronger” culture, and it was expected that both AMs and FFs would equally determine the strength of the culture. Support for this prediction was found in Sample 2, where scores on the CRT-RMS and FF Strength Scale were unrelated ($r = .03, p = ns$). However, in Sample 1, assessment of the degree to which individuals would have to engage in certain behaviors to assimilate in FF cultures was associated with scores on the CRT-RMS ($r = .18, p < .05$). As was the case for the AM Strength Scale in Sample 1, this suggests that AMs may be keenly aware of the environments that facilitate – and, in this case, thwart – the behaviors in which they wish to engage.

Affiliative Cultures

A unit-weighted composite scale was created from the three descriptions believed to be representative of affiliative workplace cultures. Consistent with the prediction, interpretation of the affiliative culture was associated with neither the motive to achieve nor the motive to avoid failure in Sample 1 ($r = .03$) or Sample 2 ($r = .03$). This null

prediction, while uncharacteristic, was intended to highlight how non-press-for-achievement environments do not evoke the motives to achieve and avoid failure, thus strengthening confidence in the differential framing of AM and FF cultures. In light of the mixed findings with regard to those cultures, however, the impact of this null result is diminished. The AFIL Strength Scale was created in the same fashion as the strength scales for the other cultures, and though CRT-RMS was not associated with the AFIL Strength Scale in Sample 2 ($r = .04$), scores on the implicit measure were associated with affiliative culture strength in Sample 1 ($r = .22, p < .05$). As was the case for the AM Strength Scale and the FF Strength Scale, this suggests that the more participants were characterized by the motive to achieve, the more likely they were to perceive the behavior behaviors necessary to fit in at an affiliative workplace. As scores on the CRT-RMS have been found to covary with critical intellectual skills (James, 1998), another possible explanation for these findings is that AMs are slightly more perceptive in general.

Table 2. Intercorrelations Among Measures

| | Sample 1 | | | | | | | |
|------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 1. CRT-RMS | | | | | | | | |
| 2. AM Scale | 0.06 | | | | | | | |
| 3. AM Strength | 0.23 | -0.08 | | | | | | |
| 4. FF Scale | -0.03 | 0.03 | 0.10 | | | | | |
| 5. FF Strength | 0.18 | 0.07 | 0.20 | -0.12 | | | | |
| 6. AFIL Scale | 0.03 | 0.00 | 0.13 | 0.09 | 0.09 | | | |
| 7. AFIL Strength | 0.22 | 0.15 | 0.35 | 0.17 | 0.63 | -0.04 | | |
| 8. WOFO | 0.14 | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.01 | 0.14 | 0.03 | 0.03 | |
| 9. TAS | -0.08 | -0.13 | -0.13 | 0.10 | -0.14 | 0.05 | -0.18 | 0.02 |

| | Sample 2 | | | | | | | |
|------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 1. CRT-RMS | | | | | | | | |
| 2. AM Scale | 0.14 | | | | | | | |
| 3. AM Strength | 0.14 | -0.05 | | | | | | |
| 4. FF Scale | -0.21 | -0.06 | 0.03 | | | | | |
| 5. FF Strength | 0.03 | 0.14 | 0.01 | 0.15 | | | | |
| 6. AFIL Scale | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.09 | | | |
| 7. AFIL Strength | 0.04 | 0.10 | 0.32 | 0.08 | 0.64 | 0.02 | | |
| 8. WOFO | 0.04 | 0.23 | 0.08 | -0.30 | 0.00 | -0.03 | 0.03 | |
| 9. TAS | 0.05 | 0.03 | -0.13 | 0.20 | 0.10 | 0.10 | -0.05 | 0.02 |

Note: CRT-RMS = Conditional Reasoning Test-Relative Motive Strength; AM Scale = Culture scale designed to appeal to motive to achieve; AM Strength = Perception of strength of AM cultures; FF Scale = Culture scale designed to appeal to motive to avoid failure; FF Strength = Perception of strength of FF Scale; AFIL Scale = Non-evocative affiliative culture scale; AFIL Strength = Perception of strength of AFIL Scale; WOFO = Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire (AM self-report); TAS = Test Anxiety Scale (FF self-report). $N = 173$ for Sample 1; $N = 89$ for Sample 2. Sample 1 correlations that exceed $\pm .15$, $p < .05$; Sample 2 correlations that exceed $\pm .21$, $p < .05$

Discussion

The results of this study do not unequivocally support the proposition that individuals with contrasting motives assign qualitatively different meanings to the same environmental stimuli. That is not to say, however, that this study did not generate any

evidence of the operation of differential framing, particularly when several of the results obtained from Sample 2 are examined. Considering the relatively novel means of testing the propositions, much can be gleaned from these data. For instance, the negative relationship ($r = -.21, p = .05$) between the CRT-RMS and the 8-item scale comprising the cultures modeled after conventional and dependent cultures (i.e., the FF Scale) is encouraging and provides partial support for Hypothesis 2. The findings indicate that the greater an individual is dominated by the motive to achieve (i.e., their resultant tendency is to consistently approach and persist at challenging, worthy tasks) the less favorably that person evaluates organizational cultures characterized by hierarchy, bureaucratic control, and centralized decision-making. Interpreted another way, the more individuals are characterized by the need to avoid failure, the more favorably they evaluate such conservative cultures. The point, of course, is that the same culture is evaluated in qualitatively different terms (e.g., “stifling” vs. “practical”) by individuals with contrasting latent motives. That is, Sample 2 participants differentially framed the FF cultures. This discrepant appraisal is consistent with the idea that AMs tend to become bored and restless in environments in which they are not engaged and challenged (e.g., McClelland, 1985).

The link between motive and meaning is further strengthened when the results of the self-report measures collected in Sample 2 are considered in relation to the AM and FF scales. Scores on both the AM and FF scales were predicted by scores on the WOFO, the measure of explicit or *self-ascribed* motive to achieve (see McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989). The correlation between the WOFO and AM Scale ($r = .23, p < .05$) indicates that as the more an individual describes himself as achievement motivated, the

more he will describe achievement-oriented workplaces in favorable terms; the less an individual makes achievement-motivated self-ascriptions, the more he describes achievement-oriented cultures in terms unfavorable to him (e.g., “compulsive” vs. “motivated”). The relationship between the WOFO and the FF Scale was of even greater magnitude (i.e., $-.30$), suggesting that as individuals increasingly describe themselves as achievement-motivated, their descriptions of conservative, bureaucratically-controlled workplaces become less favorable (e.g., “uninspiring” vs. “level-headed”). The same finding insinuates that as individuals make fewer achievement-oriented self-ascriptions, they more favorably evaluate the same workplaces (e.g., “level-headed” vs. “uninspiring”). Finally, the relationship between the self-report measure of fear of failure (i.e., the TAS) and the FF Scale, while not meaningful in conventional statistical terms ($r = .20, p = .06$), suggests that elevated self-reports of anxiety over failing are associated with favorable descriptions of conventional and dependent work cultures. These relationships provide further support for the notion that individual motives are associated with individuals assigning different meanings to the same workplace environment.

The findings from Sample 2 provide important insights into the operation of differential framing and the interpretation of organizational culture, both of which were focal points of this dissertation. On the one hand, at least among people like those in Sample 2 (i.e., predominately-female undergraduates approximately 21 years old), individuals who are unconsciously compelled by contrasting motives – such as the motives to achieve and avoid failure – assign qualitatively different meanings to the same environmental stimuli. Ostensibly, then, this process serves to transform the environment in manner consistent with the underlying behavioral motive (cf. Bem, 1972; Festinger,

1957; James & McIntyre, 1996; James & Mazerolle, 2002). This is differential framing. Additionally, the product of this differential framing is significant for organizational-culture research because it indicates that what is good for the goose is not necessarily good for the gander. Less colloquially, an organization may strive to build and maintain a certain type of culture, but if the organization is populated by individuals compelled by discrepant motives the effort may be somewhat futile because the workplace may be personalized in a manner consistent with the employees' underlying motives. Of course, this issue could be addressed in the selection process if careful attention is paid to the measurement of both implicit and explicit motives – and their less-obvious implications. Regardless, these findings in Sample 2 provide one possible explanation for the lack of relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance (e.g., Martin, 1995).

On the surface of things, however, the findings from the larger Sample 1 do relatively little to inspire faith in the generalizability of the findings obtained in Sample 2. There are several possible explanations for why relationships among the measured variables were not observed in Sample 1, and the first pertains to the participant scores on the CRT-RMS (See Table 3 for distributions in both samples). The mean CRT-RMS score in Sample 1 ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 3.85$) was nearly double that of participants in Sample 2 ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 4.02$), $t(260) = 3.59$, $p < .001$, indicating – perhaps not surprisingly, considering the ACT scores associated with the university – that most of the participants were characterized by the motive to achieve. As further illustration of this bunching of scores, when Sample 1 scores on the CRT-RMS were subjected to a scaling procedure designed to aid theoretical interpretation (i.e., the sorting of scores according to FF,

Aspiring FF, Indeterminate, Aspiring AM, and AM; see James, 1998), 142 of 173 of participants (82.1%) were classified as Aspiring AM ($N = 25$) or AM ($N = 117$). With such a restricted range of scores on the predictor variable, relationships of the magnitude observed among measures in Sample 2 (i.e., correlations in the .20s) stood little chance of obtaining in Sample 1. The scores in Sample 2 themselves were bunched toward the AM end of the spectrum (51% AM, 16% Aspiring AM) and likely tamped relationships in that sample, but the mean and overall distribution of the CRT-RMS were much closer to those reported by James and colleagues in previous research (e.g., 2.42 and 2.73) than were those from Sample 1.

Compounding the issues presented by the bunching of CRT-RMS scores toward the AM end of the spectrum are the characteristics of the marginal distributions of the AM Scale in each sample. As can be seen in Table 3, the AM Scale was highly and negatively skewed in Sample 1 (-1.06) and Sample 2 (-1.54), substantially more than the CRT-RMS. Additionally, the CRT-RMS was not kurtotic in either sample, while the AM Scale was highly leptokurtic in Sample 2 (2.70) and fairly leptokurtic in Sample 1 (.71). These discrepant marginal distributions between the AM Scale and CRT-RMS in each sample would have the effect of suppressing relationships between the variables. That is, incongruence in the marginal distributions between the AM Scale and the CRT-RMS makes the restricted-range issue of the CRT-RMS nearly intractable without substantial manipulation (i.e., correction) of observed data. Additionally, the skew of the FF Scale (.45) and CRT-RMS (-.31) in Sample 1 are in opposite directions, providing further challenge to the emergence of meaningful relationships. The incongruent marginal distributions between predictor and criterion variables represents a reasonable

explanation for the lack of observed relationships, and the issue likely involved the novel criteria.

Table 3. Distributions of CRT-RMS and AM and FF Scales

| Sample | Mean | SD | Skew | (st. error) | Kurtosis | (st. error) |
|----------|-------|------|-------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| Sample 1 | | | | | | |
| CRT-RMS | 3.99 | 3.85 | -0.31 | 0.19 | 0.00 | 0.37 |
| AM Scale | 0.66 | 0.33 | -1.06 | 0.19 | 0.71 | 0.37 |
| FF Scale | -0.24 | 0.48 | 0.45 | 0.19 | -0.35 | 0.37 |
| Sample 2 | | | | | | |
| CRT-RMS | 2.16 | 4.02 | -0.35 | 0.26 | 0.10 | 0.51 |
| AM Scale | 0.70 | 0.33 | -1.54 | 0.26 | 2.70 | 0.51 |
| FF Scale | -0.21 | 0.50 | 0.15 | 0.26 | -0.91 | 0.51 |

Note: CRT-RMS = Conditional Reasoning Test-Relative Motive Strength; AM Scale = Culture scale designed to appeal to motive to achieve; AM Strength = Perception of strength of AM cultures; FF Scale = Culture scale designed to appeal to motive to avoid failure. *N* = 173 for Sample 1; *N* = 89 for Sample 2.

The goal of this study was to test the viability of differential framing as both an explanatory personality process and a means by which individuals may arrive at discrepant impressions of the same organizational culture. Toward this end, 19 organizational cultures were designed with careful theoretical consideration, consultation with subject-matter experts, and limited item tryout. However, the data collected in this study essentially represent the premiere of these items as a means of testing the propositions that compelled the study, and as such opportunities for improvement were likely to be found. Though the reliabilities of both the AM Scale and the FF Scale were

respectable for this stage of scale design (see Table 1), there is little doubt that some items “worked” better than others, and this certainly affected the relationships observed between the CRT-RMS and the scales.

Consider first the eight items that comprised the AM Scale. In Sample 1 the items had a mean correlation with the CRT-RMS of .08 (see Table 4), and ranged in association with the predictor from -.25 (AM-6) to .32 (AM-7). This item discrepancy is bound to contaminate the criterion, and *post-hoc*, exploratory analyses revealed an improved criterion when certain items were removed from the scale. Simply omitting AM-6 and its unexpected negative coefficient from the scale boosted the average scale-item correlation with the CRT-RMS to .13. Removing two other AM Scale items that were not associated with the CRT-RMS, such as AM-2 ($r = -.03$) and AM-3 ($r = -.08$), increased the mean item correlation with the predictor to .21; a three-item scale composed of items AM-5, AM-7, and AM-8 correlated .24 with the CRT-RMS. Similar effects were found when *post-hoc* explorations of the AM Scale data from Sample 2 were undertaken. For instance, when AM-8 and its negative coefficient were dropped from the scale, the mean item correlation with the CRT-RMS increased from .10 to .14. Further improvement was seen when AM-2 (-.01) and AM-3 (-.06) were dropped, as the five remaining items had a mean correlation of .21 with the CRT-RMS. An AM Scale composed of the three items that were most strongly related to the CRT-RMS in Sample 2 (i.e., AM-1, AM-5, and AM-7) yielded an average correlation of .26 with the predictor.

Table 4. CRT-RMS and Scale-Item Correlations

| | Sample 1 | Sample 2 |
|--------|----------|----------|
| AM-1 | .13 | .38 |
| AM-2 | -.03 | -.01 |
| AM-3 | -.08 | -.06 |
| AM-4 | .13 | .16 |
| AM-5 | .19 | .22 |
| AM-6 | -.25 | .15 |
| AM-7 | .32 | .17 |
| AM-8 | .27 | -.24 |
| FF-1 | -.03 | -.31 |
| FF-2 | -.02 | .02 |
| FF-3 | .03 | -.19 |
| FF-4 | -.08 | .03 |
| FF-5 | -.03 | -.28 |
| FF-6 | -.10 | -.14 |
| FF-7 | -.05 | -.27 |
| FF-8 | .04 | -.10 |
| AFIL-1 | .03 | .05 |
| AFIL-2 | -.03 | -.06 |
| AFIL-3 | .11 | .26 |

Note: CRT-RMS = Conditional Reasoning Test-Relative Motive Strength; AM = Culture description designed to appeal to motive to achieve; FF = Culture description designed to appeal to motive to avoid failure; AFIL = Non-evocative affiliative culture. *N* = 173 for Sample 1; *N* = 89 for Sample 2.

Due to the extreme restriction of range in CRT-RMS scores in Sample 1, exploratory analyses of the FF Scale items were conducted only on Sample 2. Much of the evidence uncovered *post hoc* further suggests that enhanced psychometric properties associated with the measurement of differential framing would strengthen the viability and utility of the phenomenon. In the highly internally-consistent (.86; see Table 1) FF Scale in Sample 2, the mean item correlation with the CRT-RMS was -.15, and when three items unrelated to the implicit measure were dropped (i.e., FF-2, FF-4, and FF-8)

the mean correlation was boosted to -.24. An FF Scale composed of the three items most highly related to the CRT-RMS (i.e., FF-1, FF-5, and FF-7) would have a mean correlation of -.29 with the predictor measure. Like the *post-hoc* analyses of the AM Scale detailed in the preceding paragraph, these exploratory analyses of the FF Scale in Sample 2 suggest that differential framing as a means of measuring culture and other organizational phenomena holds promise.

CHAPTER 3

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Differential framing represents relatively uncharted scientific territory, and this dissertation outlined the process by which the phenomenon occurs and provided data that, in part, illustrates its potential impact. One goal of this study was to provide an account of individual differences in the assignment of meaning, thereby providing a useful link between the motive and trait units of human personality. The evidence observed in Sample 2 and *post hoc* in both samples suggests that motives may indeed yield meaning. This nascent relationship is critically important to the understanding, explanation, and prediction of human behavior because, as was discussed earlier in the paper, individuals want to believe their behavior is logical and rational. Differential framing represents, then, a process by which individuals transform the environment into subjective terms consistent with their underlying motives, thereby facilitating the expression of those motives (i.e., behavior). The data presented in this dissertation cautiously support this mediating link between motives and the behaviors that come to represent traits, thus helping bridge the trait and social-cognitive disciplines of personality psychology (Cervone, 1991).

The application of differential framing to organizational culture was intended to demonstrate the phenomenon and further probe of the relationship between culture direction and culture strength. As previously mentioned, one peculiar finding of this study was that for each of the three measures of culture strength in Sample 1, elevated awareness of the behaviors necessary to fit in at AM, FF, and AFIL workplaces was

associated with scores on the CRT-RMS. Perhaps this relationship pertains to the critical intellectual skills generally associated with achievement motivation, or another explanation might exist for this relationship – perhaps AMs tend to be more schematic for achieving across environments. Researchers who study – and, therefore, measure – organizational culture would be wise to maintain an awareness that not only may the same workplace potentially mean different things to different people, but the actual awareness of the culture may depend on personality characteristics. Of course, the CRT-RMS was not associated with any of the culture-strength scales in Sample 2, so more research into this question is needed. Regardless, the evidence of differential framing of the FF cultures in Sample 2 lends credence to the call by Rentsch (1990) for researchers to not impute their own meanings into employee perceptions and instead ascertain what employee perceptions *mean*.

This dissertation also contributes to the understanding of the motives to achieve and avoid failure and the conditional-reasoning approach to personality (e.g., James, 1998). At the risk of excessive recapitulation, evidence presented in this study suggests that AMs and FFs assign qualitatively different meanings to the same environmental stimulus. For years, researchers studying these motives have detailed how certain environments are likely to be experienced by individuals compelled by the motives (e.g., Atkinson, 1957, McClelland, 1985), and the data presented here suggest *how* AMs and FFs come to experience the environments. This transformative interpretation of the environment also strengthens a central tenet of the conditional-reasoning approach to personality: What is considered a logical and justified response to the environment is conditional on the personality of the individual doing the reasoning (i.e., the framing and

analysis). The evidence presented in this study suggests that differential framing does, indeed, operate as a broad category of cognitive bias by which personality-specific justification mechanisms (JMs) may be built (e.g., James & Mazerolle, 2002).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study bode well for the continued exploration and application of differential framing, but enthusiasm should be tempered by several factors associated with this study. Most distressing is that the results of Sample 2 did not obtain in Sample 1. Several reasonable explanations for this lack of replication were cited in the previous section of the paper, but it bears repeating that the cautious embrace of differential framing stems from only one of the samples in this study. The primary limitation of Sample 1 was the compression of CRT-RMS scores toward the AM pole, thus likely obscuring any potential meaningful relationships. In order to better generalize the findings to that university's population and beyond, a sample with greater variance in this predictor variable is needed. Another limitation of this study was the relatively untested means of addressing the predictions. The culture descriptions and ensuing adjectives functioned reasonably well and likely would improve with further iteration, but a method such as multidimensional scaling may more precisely determine how different the same stimulus really is to different individuals. Finally, in addition to the relatively modest sample sizes (particularly Sample 2) and magnitudes of the observed relationships, it must be noted that the findings presented in this dissertation were generated by university undergraduates. Given the presumed stability of the motives to achieve and avoid failure (McClelland, 1985), this is not a major drawback but one worth bearing in mind when drawing conclusions.

An issue that could have presented substantial challenge to this study but appears to offer optimism for future research was the capability of the culture descriptions to evoke the motives to achieve and avoid failure. Recall from the earlier discussion of the motives that they must be evoked by a high-pressure-for-achievement setting, characterized as a personally-meaningful task in which effort and persistence are required of the individual, success is not certain, and performance will be evaluated according to a standard. The ecological validity of the methodology in this study was of concern because it is one thing to evaluate descriptions of organizational cultures via a Web site, and quite another to experience a real-life approach/avoid situation in which shame and humiliation might arise from failure. Yet evidence generated by this study suggests that careful design of stimulus cultures may indeed yield approximation of the real world sufficient to evoke the motives to achieve and avoid failure, at least in terms of the measurement of meaning. That many of the culture items individually were associated with scores on the CRT-RMS attests to the potential viability of both the methodology in this study and the application of differential framing.

Future organizational research should benefit from the application of the insights generated by this study, particularly in domains that concern social perception and may involve individual differences in meaning assignment. Contemporary approaches to performance appraisal (e.g., Murphy & Cleveland, 1995) and leadership (e.g., House & Aditya, 1997) are two such areas that may benefit from a consideration of differential framing, as findings presented here suggest that behavior regarded as “driven” or “motivated” by one individual may be viewed as “obsessive” or “excessive” by another. Likewise, what one person regards as “supportive leadership” may be – perfectly

logically – viewed as “micromanagement” by someone else in the same situation.

Consideration of the impact of individual motives on transformation of the environment also likely would benefit scholars and practitioners interested in issues related to person-organization fit (e.g., Ployhart, 2006), the assessment of job satisfaction (i.e., is *autonomy* “liberating” and “empowering,” or “overwhelming” and “threatening”?), and perceived organizational support (e.g., Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). It does not require a leap of faith to propose that individuals who interpret characteristics of their organizations in qualitatively different terms, as did the participants in Sample 2 of this study, might also perceive support from their organizations in discrepant ways. The application of the concepts and evidence presented in this study would likely enrich our understanding of how individuals experience the workplace, thus enabling us to better predict their behavior in it.

Conclusion

This study attempted to explicate and validate a personality process by which individuals compelled by different motives transform the same event into qualitatively different terms (James & McIntyre, 1996; James & Mazerolle, 2002). Evidence generated by this study attests to the potential viability of differential framing as both a social-cognitive process and a means by which the same organizational events can – perfectly logically – hold distinct meanings to individuals compelled by contrasting motives. These findings highlight the need for researchers working in organizational science and elsewhere to remain vigilant to issues associated with individual differences in the assignment of meaning and how these differences may predict discrepant behaviors. Further refinement of the methodology used to assess differential framing and the theory

behind the phenomenon (i.e., evidence presented here suggests the operation of both implicit and explicit motives) likely will clarify and edify the conclusions tentatively drawn in this study. It is expected that in future research differential framing will contribute to a richer understanding of human behavior and how it inevitably impacts the workplace environment.

APPENDIX A

JUSTIFICATION MECHANISMS FOR ACHIEVEMENT

MOTIVATION

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Personal Responsibility Inclination | Tendency to favor personal factors such as initiative, intensity, and persistence as the most important causes of performance on demanding tasks. |
| 2. Opportunity Inclination | Tendency to frame demanding tasks on which success is uncertain as challenges that offer opportunities to demonstrate present skills, to learn new skills, and to make a contribution. |
| 3. Positive Connotation of Achievement Striving | Tendency to associate effort (intensity, persistence) on demanding tasks to dedication, concentration, commitment, and involvement. |
| 4. Malleability of Skills | Tendency to assume that the skills necessary to master demanding tasks can, if necessary, be learned or developed via training, practice, and experience. |
| 5. Efficacy of Persistence | Tendency to assume that continued effort and commitment will overcome obstacles or any initial failures that might occur on a demanding task. |
| 6. Identification with Achievers | Tendency to empathize with the sense of enthusiasm, intensity, and striving that characterize those who succeed in demanding situations. Selectively focus on positive incentives that accrue from succeeding. |

APPENDIX B

JUSTIFICATION MECHANISMS FOR FEAR OF FAILURE

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. External Attribution Inclination | Tendency to favor external factors such as lack of resources, situational constraints, intractable material, or biased evaluations as the most important causes of performance on demanding tasks. |
| 2. Liability Inclination | Tendency to frame demanding tasks as personal liabilities or “threats” because one may fail and be seen as incompetent. Perceptions of threat are euphemistically expressed through terms such as risky, costly, and venturesome. |
| 3. Negative Connotation of Achievement Striving | Tendency to frame effort (intensity, persistence) on demanding tasks as overloading or stressful. Perseverance on demanding tasks after encountering setbacks or obstacles is associated with compulsiveness and lack of self-discipline. |
| 4. Fixed Skills | Tendency to assume that problem-solving skills are fixed and cannot be enhanced by experience, training, or dedication to learning. Thus, if one is deficient in a skill, then one should not attempt demanding tasks or should withdraw if one encounters initial failures. |
| 5. Leveling | Tendency to discount a culturally valent but, for the reasoner, a psychologically hazardous event (e.g., approaching demanding situations) by associating that event with a dysfunctional and aversive outcome (e.g., cardiovascular disease). |
| 6. Identification with Failures | Tendency to empathize with the fear and anxiety of those who fail in demanding situations, selectively focus on negative outcomes that accrue from failing. |
| 7. Indirect Compensation | An attempt to increase the logical appeal of replacing a threatening situation with a compensatory (i.e., less-threatening) situation by |

imbuing the less-threatening situation with positive, socially desirable qualities.

8. Self-Handicapping

An attempt to deflect explanations for failure away from incompetence in favor of self-induced impairments such as not really trying or not being prepared (e.g., defensive lack of effort).

APPENDIX C

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE DESCRIPTIONS

- AM-1 Employees at Company I push themselves to great lengths in driving the company forward. Work is fast-paced and varied, with employees often tackling multiple challenging projects simultaneously. Employees pride themselves on accomplishing difficult projects, treating each task as an opportunity to showcase and improve their skills. Time is not wasted at Company I, and the most valued employees are those who consistently surpass what it is expected of them.
MOTIVATED COMPULSIVE AWKWARD DULL
- AM-2 Company J encourages its employees to maximize their potential and gives them an opportunity to do so with a variety of challenging projects. Employees waste little time in pushing themselves and each other to surpass expectations and constantly improve their skill sets. Company J employees are busy multi-taskers who relish hard work, self-development and advancement.
DRIVEN OBSESSIVE SLIGHT PASSIVE
- AM-3 Company A employees relish pushing themselves to ever greater heights, often working long hours in the pursuit of objectives that allow them master new skills and stand out from their peers. Employees consistently try to exceed expectations, and work often involves a variety of challenging tasks. Valued employees at Company A are those who thrive when much is asked of them.
GO-GETTING EXCESSIVE CLERICAL BLANK
- AM-4 Work at Company B is fast-paced and varied, with employees often working on several challenging projects at the same time. Employees take pride in completing difficult projects, treating each task as an opportunity to showcase their skills. Time is not wasted at Company B, and employees advance early in their careers by consistently surpassing expectations.
AMBITIOUS COMPULSIVE DRY PEDESTRIAN
- AM-5 Employees waste little time in the fast-paced environment at Company E, and employees enjoy pushing themselves to accomplish a variety of projects, often at the same time. New skill mastery and development are critical to the success of Company E employees and the organization itself. Employees have great impact and consistently aim to stand out and go "above and beyond" the requirements of their roles.
COMMITTED EXTREME GUARDED SERENE

- AM-6 Employees at Company F challenge themselves to reach beyond their comfort zones in the pursuit of company objectives, and most employees work long hours to ensure the company remains ahead of its competitors. Employees are encouraged to take on a variety of challenging projects and develop and showcase the skills necessary to get the job done.
GO-GETTING EXCESSIVE BLAND SYNTHETIC
- AM-7 Working on a variety of challenging projects simultaneously is the norm for Company G employees, who stand out by pushing themselves to consistently improve. Work at Company G is fast-paced and offers employees a constant opportunity to develop and demonstrate new skills in the workplace. Employees do not waste time, and the most valued employees are those who consistently surpass what it is expected of them.
DRIVEN OBSESSIVE ACCIDENTAL OPINIONATED
- AM-8 Employees at Company K push themselves to great lengths in driving the company forward. Work is fast-paced and varied, with employees often tackling multiple challenging projects simultaneously. Employees pride themselves on accomplishing difficult projects, treating each task as an opportunity to showcase and improve their skills. Time is not wasted at Company K, and the most valued employees are those who consistently surpass what it is expected of them.
MOTIVATED COMPULSIVE UNCLEAN LAZY
- FF-1 Company L is characterized by a strong centralized chain of command that ensures each employee knows his or her task, and employees rarely stand out from one another. Employees put in an "honest day's work" and value fitting in with the way things are done. Promotion generally occurs after employees have worked at the company for a certain amount of time.
SENSIBLE MONOTONOUS CAREFREE NOVEL
- FF-2 Operations at Company M are streamlined so that employees know exactly what they are to do. As a result, employees work fixed hours and advance in the organization by doing things in traditional ways. Employees at Company M often work in teams and tend not to stand out from one another.
REASONABLE BORING CLEAN JOYFUL
- FF-3 Collaboration and teamwork are valued at Company N, and as a result individual employees rarely are put in the spotlight. Employees generally advance in the company in an step-by-step fashion that rewards employees with longevity. Company N employees work 40-hour weeks and do not work overtime or on weekends.
PRACTICAL DULL BROAD LIBERAL
- FF-4 Expectations are clear at Company O, and employees work in well-defined positions that require little interpretation or improvisation. Teamwork and joint decision making are the norms at Company O, and employees generally are promoted after having worked with the company for a specific period of time.
LEVEL-HEADED UNINSPIRING PROSPECTIVE RECREATIONAL

- FF-5 Employees make great efforts to “fit in” with the traditions of Company P, and work is predictable and manageable. Employees have relatively little ambiguity in doing their jobs and, thus, are rarely singled out by supervisors. Employees generally adhere to policy and do things “the way they’ve always been done.”
SENSIBLE STIFLING HAPHAZARD FLUID
- FF-6 Employees at Company Q are committed to doing things the way their supervisors do them. As a result, employees generally do not have to take a lot of risks and “stick their necks out.” Work tends to be relatively manageable and done according to long-standing tradition at the company. Forty-hour work weeks are the norm at Company Q.
LOGICAL MONOTONOUS PROGRESSIVE MERCURIAL
- FF-7 Operations at Company R are streamlined so that employees know exactly what they are to do. As a result, employees work fixed hours and advance in the organization by doing things in traditional ways. Employees at Company R often work in teams and tend not to stand out from one another.
PRACTICAL BORING NOISY MAGNETIC
- FF-8 Employees make great efforts to “fit in” with the traditions of Company P, and work is predictable and manageable. Employees have relatively little ambiguity in doing their jobs and, thus, are rarely singled out by supervisors. Employees generally adhere to policy and do things “the way they’ve always been done.”
REASONABLE UNINTERESTING SLIGHT DIVERSE
- AF-1 Friendliness is highly valued at Company B: Management encourages employees to take interest in the well-being of their coworkers, and personal relationships flourish at the company. A spirit of camaraderie pervades the environment at Company B, and rudeness and aggression are quite rare. Valued employees are both productive and considerate organizational citizens.
PLEASANT UNAPPEALING STERILE VOLUNTARY
- AF-2 Employees at Company C work hard and get along with one another. There is a sense that people in the organization are pulling in the same direction, and as a result personal relationships at the company frequently develop among coworkers. Employees tend to regard one another as “family,” and employees tend to look after each other’s best interests.
PLEASANT UNAPPEALING FRAUDULENT MAPLE
- AF-3 Friendliness is highly valued at Company B: Management encourages employees to take interest in the well-being of their coworkers, and personal relationships flourish at the company. A spirit of camaraderie pervades the environment at Company B, and rudeness and aggression are quite rare. Valued employees are both productive and considerate organizational citizens.
PLEASANT UNAPPEALING QUIET FLAT

- D-1 Employees at Company H are greatly committed to environmental causes, and decisions and actions within the organization are made with one eye on the bottom line and the other on environmental impact. Employees undergo training that highlights simple and effective ways in which the company's ecological "footprint" can be minimized. Additionally, employees regularly submit suggestions on ways the company can improve its environmental performance.
- SENSIBLE UNWISE DEVIOUS BACKWARD
- D-2 Employees at Company Q are greatly committed to environmental causes, and decisions and actions within the organization are made with one eye on the bottom line and the other on environmental impact. Employees undergo training that highlights simple and effective ways in which the company's ecological "footprint" can be minimized. Additionally, employees regularly submit suggestions on ways the company can improve its environmental performance.
- SENSIBLE UNWISE SOFT TEDIOUS

AM = Achievement motive; FF = Fear of failure; AF = Affiliative; D = Distractor. For AM descriptions, the first adjective is the AM response; the second adjective is the FF response; and the final two responses are meant to be illogical. For FF descriptions, the FF response is the first adjective.

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