Collaborative Writing Activities at Midwest Utility

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Studying how collaborative writing occurs in the workplace affords a naturalistic setting to investigate situated writing. Said differently, workplace documents are constructed in response to organizational needs and have real consequences. As such, a contextualized account of how workplace documents are collaboratively constructed can provide insight into the ways in which texts function in a particular workplace setting. However, researching workplace collaborative writing can be a daunting task due to the multiple ways in which collaboration can be operationalized. For example, current scholarship has discussed collaboration in terms of group dynamics, meditational means and stages of the writing process.

There are multiple ways in which group dynamics can be explored in the context of workplace collaborative writing. At the broadest level, Spilka (1993) differentiates between internal and external group collaboration. Internal group collaboration is defined as a group in which all collaborators are affiliated with the same organization. Conversely, external group collaboration is classified as collaboration that occurs between two or more organizations. Speaking to the dynamics within a given group, most scholarship agrees that specific roles are assumed throughout the collaborative
process. These roles include editor, writer(s), subject matter expert(s) and reviewer(s) (Lowry et al. 2004).

As Haas (1996) argues, in order to understand how technologies mediate composing processes it is necessary to look at technologies and not through technologies. As such, existing scholarship has examined the ways in which different technologies are used to facilitate collaboration. Specifically, scholars have investigated the use of instant messaging (Cameron, 2005), e-mail (Jones 2005) and groupware (Duin, 1991) to mediate collaboration.

Lowry et al. (2004) explain that the collaborative writing process entails: brainstorming, converging on brainstorming, outlining, drafting, reviewing, revising and copyediting (p. 82). However, few empirical studies have provided insight into how these stages in the collaborative writing process occur. A better understanding of how each of these steps are operationalized can provide evidence how texts function in the workplace. For example, Kleimann (1991) argues that “document review is an integral part of organizational writing that transforms individual products into institutional products” (p. 520).

This dissertation is situated within this gap in existing workplace collaborative writing research and contributes empirical evidence of how six professional communicators collaboratively construct an internal newsletter for Midwest Utility, a large utility company. A consequence of Midwest Utility’s decentralized structure is that the professional communicators work in three different offices located across three
different states. As such, the professional communicators utilize various technological tools to mediate their collaborative process. Of specific interest are the ways in which the professional communicators use the review features afforded in Microsoft Word to facilitate the document review process. Specifically, the professional communicators insert marginal comments to address textual issues. Careful analysis of these collaborative response practices has yielded evidence of the specific ways in which the professional communicators exchange in a dialogue, via comments, in attempt to create effective corporate communications in distributed collaboration.

1.1 Research Design

In the following section, I address how the study was designed. This discussion begins with a succinct argument of the perceived research problem in which this dissertation is situated. Then, the theoretical underpinnings of the project are made explicit. Specifically, the study’s design was influenced and informed by social constructivism. Consequently, a case study was conducted at Midwest Utility to investigate how professional communicators collaborate. A chief argument made throughout this dissertation is that Midwest Utility’s decentralized structure necessitates that the professional communicators participate in distributed
collaboration\textsuperscript{1}. As such, a corporate profile is provided to introduce the organizational context in which the professional communicators’ collaborative efforts are embedded prior to explaining the impetus of and function of the Delivery News publication.

**Research Problem.** The research problem that motivated this dissertation is that relatively few empirical studies have investigated how professional communicators collaborate in the workplace. There are multiple reasons why addressing this problem is a worthwhile endeavor. At the most basic level, researching the collaborative writing activities of professional communicators provides information about what types of documents are collaboratively constructed, the frequency in which the collaboration occurs and an understanding as to why collaboration is preferred and/or necessary. Investigating in situ collaborative writing activities can also elucidate the intricacies included in the process. For instance, studies could provide evidence of the social, cultural and organizational contexts in which corporate documents are embedded. Moreover, exploring professional communicators’ collaborative efforts has the potential to offer insight into how they conceptualize effective writing.

**Theoretical Underpinnings.** The design of this project was influenced by an understanding that literacy is best understood as a social practice. Subscribing to this notion recognizes that literate practices are domain specific and, therefore, historically, culturally and socially situated. As Barton & Hamilton (2000) assert, literate practices

\textsuperscript{1} Distributed collaboration refers to the professional communicators’ practice of utilizing various technological tools to mediate collaboration to overcome the spatial constraints of not working in the same physical location.
“straddle the distinction between individuals and social worlds, and . . . are more usefully understood as existing in relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals” (p. 8). This perspective informed how research questions were conceived, how the study was designed and the methodological approach to data analysis.

**Initial Research Question.** During the first few months of research, the operating research question was “What types of documents are collaboratively constructed and how?” It was a purposeful decision to enter the site without a precise research question. Doing so afforded the opportunity to more fully explore different features of the site before identifying a narrower research scope.

**Design and Methodology.** Given the research objective to identify what types of documents the professional collaboratively construct and their collaborative process, a case study design was chosen. Specifically, as MacNealy (1999) explains, a case study design can provide “a holistic view of an event or situation . . . rich detail that can lead to a better understanding of an event or situation . . . information that cannot otherwise be collected . . . a more precise definition of research questions” (p. 199). Three different data sets were collected to triangulate the data for validity purposes. These data sets include: observational data, interview data and documents. Due to the nature of the data, a grounded theory methodological approach was used to analyze the data because of its ability to systematically account for social processes.
Research Site. Midwest Utility was selected as the research site due to its large communications sector. An interesting feature of the corporation is its decentralized structure and the implications this structure has to how and why the professional communicators participate in distributed collaboration. Midwest Utility functions as a holding company for its various subsidiary companies, which are responsible for the three chief operations of the utility company which include the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity. As such, Midwest Utility’s complex structure can be attributed to the fact that its subsidiary companies are located across multiple states and are legally separated from the corporation because it provides service in deregulated energy markets.

In regulated energy markets, the price of electricity is determined by state regulatory commission. Consequently, homeowners and business owners do not have the option to select their own service providers. Deregulation affords customers to choose their own service provider at competitive rates because electricity producers compete in an annual energy auction to determine energy prices. Prior to deregulation, utility companies could own and operate power plants and provide service to homes and businesses without a conflict of interest because rates were determined by the state. However, the transition from a regulated to deregulated electric industry required that electric utilities legally separate three basic business functions: generation, transmission, and distribution.
For example, the Midwest Utility Nuclear Operations and Midwest Utility Generation subsidiary companies, collectively, manage and operate 18 power plants which are responsible for generating electricity. Specifically, Midwest Utility Nuclear Operations oversees the operation of its three nuclear power plants and Midwest Utility Generation manages the other 15 power stations which use coal, gas, oil and hydro as fuel sources to generate electricity. A separate subsidiary, Midwest Utility Resolution, was created to manage the 15 non-nuclear power stations and to sell the electricity produced by those plants.

Electricity produced by the power plants is sent to the electric grid. The transformers and power lines that exist between a power plant and electrical substation transmit a relatively high voltage of electricity. The maintenance and operations of this portion of the grid is the responsibility of the transmission business unit.

The transmission business unit is responsible for the maintenance and operation of the high tension wires that transmit electricity from the power plants to electrical substations. The primary function of a substation is to convert high voltage to lower voltage currents of electricity that can be safely sent via power lines to distribute electricity homes and businesses. Activities that concern the distribution of electricity, from the substations to meters, pertain to the distribution process. The distribution process is the responsibility of Midwest Utility’s eight subsidiary, operating companies which are located across three states.

In total, Midwest Utility and its subsidiary companies employee about 13,300
employees. Over half of these employees work in the distribution business unit for the operating companies. More than a third, 35%, of employees are employed in the generation business unit. The remaining number of employees are employed in the shared services business unit. Shared services refers to company sectors that provide a service to all business units. Examples include information technology, human resources, legal services, and finance sectors.

To address the needs of its companies, business units and sectors, Midwest Utility has a large communication sector which is comprised of three departments: external communications, communications services and internal communications. The six professional communicators identified as research participants work in the internal communications department and support the Midwest Utility Operating Companies business unit. One of the specific ways in which they provide communication support to this business unit is by publishing the Delivery News newsletter.

*Delivery News newsletter.* In recent years, the director of the internal communications department discovered that Midwest Utility Operating Companies employees were writing and distributing newsletters within their respective geographical regions. This was problematic because the content included in these seemingly authoritative documents was not approved by means of the appropriate channels, which would include consulting with members of the internal communications department and/or Midwest Utility’s legal team. Consequently, these newsletters frequently reported inaccurate information. In response to these unsanctioned
newsletters, the professional communicators created the *Delivery News* newsletter to cater to all Midwest Utility Operating Companies employees and function as a consistent and reliable communication vehicle.

It can be argued that the unauthorized newsletters were a consequence of Midwest Utility’s decentralized structure given that Midwest Utility Operating Companies employees were motivated to construct the texts as a way to disseminate information to other employees in close proximity. As a result, such newsletters contained information as it was relevant to a specific area. The professional communicators were appreciative of the fact that employees wanted to share pertinent, regionally specific information with one another. In attempt to ensure that *Delivery News* contained information that pertained to all business unit employees as well as featured articles about specific locations, the group of professional communicators who collaboratively constructed the newsletters worked in three different offices located in three different states as a way to keep abreast of what occurred throughout the business unit.
1.2 Contributions

This dissertation has the potential to make valuable contributions to workplace collaborative writing scholarship, pedagogy research and the larger field of writing studies. A major contribution this dissertation makes to workplace collaborative writing research is a robust representation of the professional communicators’ document review process as it is embedded in distributed collaboration. Presenting evidence of the specific ways in which the professional communicators establish an understanding via their collaborative response practices is a unique attribute of this study which has the potential to extend upon existing research on workplace collaborative writing.

What existing studies have failed to agree upon is a definition of collaborative writing. Instead, multiple definitions have been offered which range from hyperbolic explanations to fulfilling specific criteria. For instance, Forman (1991) argues that social constructivists subscribe to the notion that “all writing is collaborative since it is intertextual” (p. 243). Less cumbersome yet still vague is the definition that Lowry et al. (2004) propose that collaborative writing “is an iterative and social process that involves a team focused on a common objective that negotiates, coordinates, and communicates during the creation of a common document” (p. 72). Allen et al. (1987) suggest that collaborative writing is defined by the following distinguishing features: “(1) production of a shared document, (2) substantive interaction among members, (3) shared decision-making power over and responsibility for document” (p. 84). Each definition has its own affordances and constraints. However, the divergent explanations are potentially
problematic when considering workplace collaborative writing as a research area.

Reflecting on their collaborative writing research, Ede & Lunsford (1990) admit that they “had difficulty eliciting information, primarily because we lack[ed] a vocabulary to discuss what people do when they write collaboratively” (p. 63). The conundrum that Ede & Lunsford encountered affects the outcomes of their study and, more broadly, workplace collaborative writing research. Specifically, Lowry et al. (2004) claim that the lack of a “common understanding of [collaborative writing] undermines the ability of researchers and practitioners to solve the core issues of” collaborative writing. In response to this problem, I argue that the findings of this project have the potential to inform a better definition of collaboration.

From a broader perspective, I believe that this dissertation can also contribute to a more substantive theory of collaboration. A unique feature of this project is that data is representative of the professional communicators’ collaborative process as it occurred over an entire year. As a result, an affordance of this study is the ability to investigate the relationship between different collaborative activities. Both Lowry et al. (2004) and Jones (2005) present theoretical discussions of the specific ways in which collaborative writing occurs in the workplace. However, what their work, as well as others’, has been unable to do is to present a robust representation of the complex relationship between collaborative writing activities. As reported in Chapter 5, this dissertation can make claims about the dynamic relationship between different types of
collaboration which can potentially contribute to a more substantive theory of collaboration.

Key findings of this dissertation can better inform pedagogical practices. As Couture & Rymer (1989) suggest, “our teaching should be informed by actual workplace practices, and not by assumptions” (p. 76). Exposing students to empirical research that demonstrates the ways in which document review occurs in the workplace will better prepare them to enter the workforce. Specifically, it is imperative for students to learn how classroom collaboration, often times, is drastically different than workplace collaboration.

An additional pedagogical contribution of this dissertation is that it explains how professional communicators function within a corporation. Although previous studies have reported on the writing constructed by professionals in a corporate setting, a limitation of existing workplace collaborative writing is that few studies explore how professional communicators craft corporate communications. The importance of this distinction is two-fold. In this study, corporate communications refer to authoritative texts created by professional communicators, on behalf of the organization, that function to distribute information to employees. As such, these documents are material manifestations of the corporation’s identity. Therefore, it is essential that the textual production of such communications be entrusted to professional communicators. Professional writing majors should be exposed to research that investigates what and
how different types of corporate communication are collaboratively constructed in a corporate setting to better prepare them of what to expect in their future careers.

Lastly, an important contribution this dissertation makes to the field of writing studies is a contextualized account of the newsletter writing process. As Blyer (1990) notes, a gap in writing studies research is the inexistence of a theory of newsletter writing. A theory of newsletter writing is needed to address the ways in how professional communicators respond to situational exigencies in the workplace and how those needs are manifested in written communication.

1.2 Chapter Synopses

Including the current chapter, this dissertation consists of five chapters. The following chapter synopses explain how this dissertation is organized and the content included in each chapter.

Because similar studies of how professional communicators collaborate could not be located, the literature review presented in Chapter 2 is organized to touch upon the principal features of the study. Specifically, this chapter reviews existing scholarship on corporate communications, professional writing, document review and computer mediated communication.

Chapter 3 begins with a description of Midwest Utility’s large communication sector that seques into a discussion about the research participants. The chapter
continues with an explanation of the three data sets which include observational data, interview data and documents. After explaining how the data was procured, a rationale is provided about the decision to narrow data analysis to the comment corpus. The last major section of Chapter 3 argues why a grounded theory methodological approach was used for data analysis. This chapter also includes a discussion of the coding procedures conducted.

The primary purpose of Chapter 4 is to present the findings that resulted from analyzing the comment corpus. However, the discussion of how codes and categories emerged from the data is preceded by a description of the professional communicators’ collaborative process for creating the Delivery News newsletter. An overview of their document review process is also presented. Explaining how the document review process is embedded in their overall collaborative process is necessary to contextualize the type of work that is accomplished during review. What follows is a thorough account of how the following categories were identified and developed: comment referent, commenting strategies, comment function and collaborative effects. These categories and respective codes were used to create the Collaborative Response Practices Heuristic. The chapter concludes by identifying communicative responsibility as the core category and arguing that it is indicative of the central phenomenon that occurs via the professional communicators’ collaborative response practices.

Chapter 5 introduces Jones’ (2005) comprehensive collaborative continuum that identifies different forms of collaboration and specific collaborative writing activities.
However, treatments of collaborative forms and activities have, typically, limited
discussion to either one collaborative form or one collaborative activity. To
demonstrate how dynamic the professional communicators’ overall collaborative
process is, this chapter begins by identifying the various forms and activities employed
by the group to collaboratively construct *Delivery News*. Also included in Chapter 5 is a
discussion of how the core category of communicative responsibility can contribute to a
substantive theory of collaboration. To conclude the chapter, and dissertation, in the
last sections I postulate the potential contributions of this study as well as identify
limitations of the dissertation.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

An unresolved issue in workplace collaborative writing research is the existence of a shared definition of collaboration. For instance, in the introduction to *Collaborative writing: An annotated bibliography*, Speck et al. (1999) argue that “More work needs to be done to develop a theory of collaborative writing that will not only define the term clearly but explain why . . . coauthorship merits such a large room in the house of discussion about writing” (p. xi). Speaking to the need for a succinct definition of collaboration, Burnett et al. (1997) claim that “working definitions vary dramatically, incorporating or ignoring factors such as the context of the collaboration, the complexity of the task, the nature of the interaction, the structure of the group, the division of work, and so on” (p. 135). Yet the absence of a shared definition has not, or so it seems, stifled the amount of workplace collaborative writing research that has been conducted due to the sense that “In many ways, collaborative writing is the kind of beast we know when we see it” (Debs, 1991, p. 479). In a similar vein, Lay & Karis (1991) claim that “Perhaps no other identifiable activity is as often practiced but as little understood as collaboration” (p. 9).
Understanding collaboration at the theoretical level is difficult for multiple reasons, one of which is that working in groups complicates the textual production process as compared to when individuals construct texts by themselves. More specifically, Farkas (1991) argues that collaborative writing is a difficult process because:

1. Highly integrated documents are very complex artifacts.
2. The process of preparing a document becomes more complex when it is performed collaboratively.
3. The writing process generates strong emotional commitments.
4. Documents are reworkable and are subject to infinite revision.
5. Collaborative writers lack fully adequate terms and concepts with which to create a clear and precise common image of the document they wish to produce.
6. It is difficult to predict or measure success. (p. 15)

Based upon these characteristics, it is easy to ascertain why collaboration is difficult for those involved. Furthermore, researching in situ collaborative workplace writing can prove challenging for researchers due to the fact that “the production of written text is a process embedded in the ongoing collaboration and cooperation that makes up the organizational structure” and, therefore “Writers know they collaborate, but they can’t always point out exactly when and where” which can make it difficult for researchers, as outsiders to the research site, to discern collaborate writing activities (Debs, 1991, p.
As a result of this problematic issue, existing workplace collaborative writing research has “begun to label different kinds of collaborative writing by highlighting particular characteristics” (Debs, 1991, p. 479). Therefore, I argue that a robust representation of workplace collaborative writing must account for and describe the goal of collaboration, context in which collaboration is situated, who collaborates, collaborative activities and tools used to mediate collaboration. Taken together, these features provide evidence of the specific ways in which in situ collaborative writing occurs in the workplace.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of the relevant literature to situate this dissertation in the area of workplace collaborative writing research. The objective of this study is to investigate and describe how six professional communicators collaboratively construct an internal newsletter in a large corporation. Therefore, to contextualize this study it is necessary to address how existing research has explored corporate communications, professional writing, document review and computer mediated communication.

2.1 Corporate Communications

Argenti & Forman (2002) define corporate communications:

as the products of communication, be they memos, letters, reports, Web sites, e-mails, speeches, or news releases. The aggregate of these
messages is what a company sends to its constituencies, whether internal or external. (p. 4)

What is important to note in their definition is the issue of authorship. The authors explain that corporate communications are sent from the company. This distinction helps to separate non-corporate communication that occurs in the same context in that corporate communications are sent from the corporation to its internal and external stakeholders. For instance, an e-mail sent from one employee to another is not an example of corporate communication by virtue of the context in which it is distributed. However, an e-mail sent on behalf of the corporation to its stakeholders would constitute a corporate communication.

According to van Riel & Fombrum (2007), corporate communication can be categorized into the following three types of communications: management, marketing and organizational (p. 14). These communication types are designed to cater to the organization’s stakeholder groups and, depending on the text’s objective, can overlap. Moreover, these communication types also organize who within the organization “is responsible for communicating about and with these [stakeholder] groups” (van Riel & Fombrum, 2007, p. 279).

Management communication. According to van Riel & Fombrum (2007), the functions of management communication are to

1. develop a shared vision of the company within the organization,
2. establish and maintain trust in the organization’s leadership,
3. initiate and manage the change process, and

4. strengthen the identification of employees with the organization. (p. 15)

Given these functions, management communications can address both internal and external audiences. For instance, the authors explain management communications provide senior management and managers with the opportunity to “continuously persuade individual subordinates that the goals of the organization are worth fighting for” (p. 15). Examples in which management communication caters to an external audience include conference presentations and lobbying legislators (p. 14).

Doheny-Farina’s (1986) ethnographic study of executives drafting a business plan provides an example of management communication that catered to external and internal audiences. Specifically, the situational exigency motivating the collaborative construction of a new business plan was, primarily, to attract investors. Doheny-Farina (1986) found evidence of the ways in which “organizational context influences writers’ conceptions of their rhetorical situations” and “how the rhetorical activities influence the structure of the organization” (p. 158). To investors, the business plan was a material representation of the organization’s attempt to change and to develop the executives’ ethos. To an internal audience, the employees, the business plan functioned to create a shared organizational vision among employees by keeping them abreast of organizational change.
Marketing communication. Van Riel & Fombrum (2007) explain that “Marketing communications consist primarily of those forms of communication that support sales of products, services and brands” and include “product advertising, direct mail, personal selling, and sponsorship activities” (p. 14-17). Kitchen (1999) provides the following examples of marketing communications:

- Advertising: Any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, and services by an identified sponsor.
- Sales promotion: Short-term incentives to encourage the purchase of a product or service.
- Personal selling: Verbal presentations in conversational form with one or more prospective purchasers for the purpose of making sales.
- Marketing public relations: Programs designed to improve, maintain, or protect the image of the company or its products. (p. 22)

At a pragmatic level, identifying examples of marketing communication is less complicated than locating instantiations of management or organizational communications. For instance, Mclsaac’s & Aschauer’s (1990) investigation of the collaborative writing processes of engineers’ contributes a straightforward example of marketing communication. Specifically, their eight-month study examined how a group of engineers collaboratively construct a proposal to solicit customers by submitting a competitive bid. As such, the primary function of the proposal was to market the
company and, in doing so, demonstrated “careful attention to the audience’s needs and probable reaction to the proposal” (McIsaac & Aschauer, 1990, p. 539).

Organizational communication. Van Riel & Fombrum (2007) explain that organizational communications “encompass public relations, public affairs, investor relations, corporate advertising, environmental communication, and internal communication” (p. 20). Additionally, they describe the four characteristics of organizational communications which include:

- Organizational communications are aimed at corporate audiences, such as shareholders, financial journalists, investment analysts, regulators, and legislators.
- Organizational communications have a long-term perspective and do not directly aim at generating sales.
- Organizational communications apply a different style of communication compared with marketing communication; exaggeration and puffery are limited and messages are more formalistic.
- Organizational communications are generally initiated by external parties. External pressures generally compel the company to reveal information that would not have been shared otherwise. (p. 20)

Winsor’s (1993) research of how engineers and public relations writers collaboratively construct a press release is an example of organizational communication
situated within public relations. The press releases created were published in trade journals and were “designed less to sell a specific product than to sell the company as a whole” which explains why this document is an example of organizational communication and not marketing communication due to the distinction between product publicity and corporate publicity (p. 182). A key finding of this study is that the engineers and public relations writers struggle over ownership of the text. The frequency in which conflict arose between these two groups is surprising given that press releases are written on behalf of an organization and no authorship is attributed on the document.

Given the context of this dissertation, further discussion of organizational communications will focus on internal communications. Internal communications are texts designed to target employees and are most often referred to as employee communications or employee relations. Chiefly, internal communications serve to enculturate employees and sponsor assimilation within a corporate culture. In order to do so, Davis et al. (2005) argue that:

All internal communication must integrate the context of corporate strategy and be directed toward meeting objectives or reporting results of employee achievement of goals. The role of internal communication has evolved to include creating understanding among employees through clarification and translation into action, not simply distributing information. (p. 23)
Depending on the ostensible function of the text, professional communicators employ various mediums, forms and modalities to create effective employee communications which can include, but are not limited to, multi-media presentations, videos, podcasts, handbooks, posters, brochures and the company intranet. Perhaps the most common and frequently distributed types of employee communications are internal newsletters due to their multiple affordances. More specifically, a positive attribute of newsletters include that they connote a consistent and credible deliverable due to the fact they are distributed at even intervals (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly). Additionally, newsletters are cost effective which is especially important in decentralized corporations. A third affordance of newsletters is that they can be made available as a digital or physical text without significantly altering their function. These foundational characteristics contribute to the overall effectiveness of a text.

Given that newsletters are a specialized genre, it was not surprising to find that previous studies pertaining to internal newsletters provide similar descriptions of their communicative functions. To illustrate this point, Hayes (1922) explains that the functions of internal publications are “The promotion of a better acquaintance and thereby a stronger feeling of good-fellowship among the workers” and “The education of the workers in production, waste-reduction, safety, health, regularity of attendance, thrift, or understanding of the company policies” (p. 81). Echoing the same sentiment, 85 years later, Welch & Jackson (2007) explain that internal newsletters are “designed
to promote commitment to the organisation, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims” (p. 186).

The content of employee newsletters has also remained consistent throughout the years. Johansen (1995) explains that *The Trip Hammer* is acknowledged by scholars as the first employee publication in North America which was started in the mid-1880s (p. 129). Summarizing the findings from analyzing over a year’s worth of publications, Johansen (1995) reports the publication’s contents as including:

- the usual personal items, such as births and deaths; stories about company social events; reports about company performance; safety messages; predictions of how external conditions will likely affect corporate performance; explanations of company policies, such as a ban on smoking in the workplace; even a story which dares to say that if management had handled things better, a recent strike could have been averted. (p. 129).

Again, over eight decades later, Welch & Jackson (2007) explain that the ways in which employee communications fulfill their communicative functions is to “portray culture by communicating corporate stories (how we influenced government policy) celebrating heroes (an award winning employee) and facilitating rituals (get your tickets for our company’s 40th anniversary party)” (p. 192).

Given that the communicative function and features of employee publications has remained consistent, it is surprising to note the limited amount of scholarship
available that interrogates the process of creating such communications. Instead, as Spilka (1993) asserts, “In organizational studies, the focus on quantitative research methodology and statistical main effects has meant a deemphasis on qualitative methods enabling close observations and detailed analysis of workplace interactions and relationships” (p. 133). Moreover, Spilka (1993) continues by positing that studies in organizational communication have failed to document the process of textual production and, therefore, further research is needed that examines the communication itself (p. 133).

An existing gap within the rhetoric and composition field is that few studies have presented a contextualized understanding of the ways in which internal newsletters are constructed in a corporate setting. Due to this limitation, it was necessary to consult literature outside the purview of this dissertation to situate the study. Specifically, defining and identifying types of corporate communications was necessary for two chief reasons. One reason is to avoid conflating workplace writing and corporate communications. More specifically, workplace writing can refer to texts produced in any workplace environment whereas corporate communications are only constructed in corporate contexts. For example, a supervisory report created by a manager in a steel mill (Mabrito, 1997) differs significantly from a service level agreement constructed in a corporation (Cross, 2000).

A second reason why it is pertinent to address and consult management and business literature to more fully understand the nature of corporate communications is
to argue that not all texts produced in a corporate setting constitutes corporate communications. As mentioned above, corporate communications are constructed to fulfill organizational objectives (van Riel & Fombrum, 2007). Therefore, instances in which professionals design a PowerPoint presentation to facilitate a team meeting or circulate an e-mail to advertise a potluck dinner are not indicative of corporate communications.

2.2 Professional Writing

An unresolved issue that exists within workplace literacy scholarship is defining professional writing. As Sullivan & Porter (1993) explain, part of the problem stems from the fact that professional writing has assumed multiple identities (p. 392). Specifically, they argue that the term professional writing has been assigned “at least three intertwined spheres of application” which include: “professional writing as a research field,” “professional writing as a workplace activity” and “professional writing as an academic curricular entity” (p.392). Within the professional writing as a research field sphere, Faber (2002) argues that professional writing has been conflated with workplace writing and, in doing so, “does not carefully distinguish between professional work and other types of occupational work” (p. 308).

In attempting to address the issue of what constitutes professional writing, scholars have tried to define professional writing in terms of context. For example,
Sullivan & Porter (1993) offer that professional writing refers to “writing for organizational forums; stress on corporate authorship” (p. 412). However, stressing corporate authorship can be a problematic move in that all members of an organization are, in some way or another, responsible for corporate authorship. According to Perelman (1986), “individuals in workplaces ‘exist largely as projections of institutional roles rather than idiosyncratic individuals,’ so that while ‘an individual can personalize an institutional role, or institutional roles can be performed in quite different ways, . . . the extent to which a role can be personalized or the number of ways the role can be acted out are always limited by institutional rules and goals” (p. 474).

Because all members of an organization can contribute to corporate authorship and identity by conforming to institutional roles to promote institutional goals, an important distinction that needs to be made in determining what is professional writing is who is doing the writing. Couture & Rymer (1993) differentiate between professional writers and professionals who write. They assert that professional writers’ chief responsibility is to construct “specialized documents directing or reporting the activities of others, such as user manuals for computer software or bulletins recording corporate activities” (p. 9). As such, Couture & Rymer (1993) posit that professional writers’ primary “function is to accommodate the needs of someone else through communication. The career writer provides a communicative mechanism though which someone else accesses a goal or product” (p. 18).
On the other hand, professionals who write may frequently find themselves writing on the job however, textual production is not their primary job responsibility. For example, engineers, nurses, and scientists produce workplace documents such as manuals, charts, and reports but their institutional role is fore grounded in the work they do not the texts they produce. Said differently, an engineer’s job is to develop software, a nurse’s duty is to provide patient care, and a scientist’s priority is conducting research. Therefore, the work these professionals engage is prioritized over the writing they construct.

2.3 Document Review

Van der Geest & van Gemert (1997) explain that purpose of document review is to improve the quality of a text as well as to “build consensus and commitment in the organization” (p. 433). Achieving both objectives can prove to be a complicated process. More specifically, Henry (2000) claims that:

For professional writers, writing projects are almost always collaborative, engaging coworkers from other professional classes, entailing multiple reviews, and often targeting multiple (and sequential) audiences (which might include themselves as citizens), fraught with second guessing on issues of organizational representation above and beyond a document’s ostensible ‘content,’ requiring interpretations of organizational culture to
the ends of adequately and appropriately delivering discursive products.

(p. 65)

To account for the ways in which document review occurs as it is embedded in the collaborative writing process, it is helpful to understand the process in two ways. More specifically, understanding who participates and how they participate in the process elucidates some of the inherent complexities of document review as a social practice.

Swarts (2003) explains that “Different readers respond by telling how to best fix the text to the activities in which they are engaged” and identifies the following participants’ roles: supervisor, expert and peer (p. 216). Swarts (2003) identifies the supervisor’s function in the document review process as the individual who ensures that the text “represents the interests of the organization” (p. 216). Cornelissen et al. (2006) further elaborate on the supervisor’s responsibilities by asserting that s/he “make a strategy or policy decisions and are held accountable for program success or failure” (p. 119). Due to the power structure, it is not surprising to find that the relationship between editor and author can become contentious when authors are notified that additional revisions are necessary to improve the quality of a text (Grove, 1990; Mancuso, 1992; Alley, 2000; Mackiewicz & Riley, 2003).

Swarts (2003) states that expert reviewers are “subject matter experts [who] assess the correctness of the document’s content” (p. 216). In their study, Lee & Mehlenbacher (2000) found that that their survey respondents reported interacting with subject matter experts on a daily basis (p. 545). Although the researchers asked...
writers to identify both the affordances and constraints of collaborating with subject matter experts, a more prominent trend in the literature is to address the fact that collaboration between professional communicators and subject matter experts is a difficult process (Walkowski, 1991; Flammia, 1993).

According to Cornelissen et al. (2006) the professional communicators who are primarily responsible for composing a text have limited agency in determining the document’s content. Instead, the professional communicator’s role is to tactically implement “decisions made by others and [are] generally not involved in management decision-making and strategic decisions concerning communication strategy and programs” (p. 119). Due to their limited capacity, Swarts (2003) explains that the role of the peer in the document review process is to “help writers focus on strategies for getting texts completed and approved” (p. 216).

However, existing studies have failed to capture the complexities inherent in document review that explain the specific strategies employed by professional communicators. Instead, the majority of research has limited its discussion of document review to a procedural description. For example, Grice (1997) and van der Geest & van Gemert (1997) provide similar descriptions of what document review entails which can be summarized as reviewers evaluating a text to determine (1) appropriateness of content, (2) accuracy and completeness of content and (3) correctness and consistency of content and language included in the document (p. 437).
To date, few studies have provided empirical data of the feedback that reviewers provide to make a document more effective with the exception of Kleimann (1993). In her investigation of document review, Kleimann (1993) categorized reviewers’ comments into the following modes: statements, questions, direct changes and non-word symbols (p. 66). She explains that the use of statements and questions most commonly referred to global rhetorical elements, non-word symbols were used as markers for the reviewers, and that direct changes were indicative of surface level errors such as grammar, punctuation, diction and spelling (Kleimann, 1993, p. 66). She concludes her analysis by claiming that the “Widespread use of questions and statements reinforces the idea that review is a negotiation process and that institutional products require balancing organizational values, knowledge bases, and perceptions” (Kleimann, 1993, p. 67).

2.4 Computer Mediated Communication

Sopensky (1994) identifies eight characteristics of successful collaboration including the need for collaborators to engage in constant communication throughout textual production (p. 711). It is not uncommon for professionals to find themselves collaborating with other professionals who do not work in the same physical space. In such situations, it is necessary to utilize various collaborative technologies to mediate collaboration because they afford the opportunity “to cross physical, social, temporal,
and psychological boundaries at an astonishingly low cost” (Berry, 2006, p. 352).

Existing studies have investigated the ways in which computer-supported technologies have constrained and facilitated group collaboration (Forman, 1987; Duin, 1991; Mabrito, 1992; Pargman, 1993; Farkas & Poltrock, 1995; Noel & Robert, 2004; Berry, 2006).

Tools designed to mediate the document review process include computer-supported collaborative work software programs such as The Coordinator, EXPRES, and Quilt (Duin, 1991). However, research has shown that programs such as these have proven to be ineffective and, therefore, are not commonly used (Duin, 1991; Grudin, 1994; Dillon & Maynard, 1995). Instead, professionals prefer to utilize word processing programs, with the most popular program being Microsoft Word because of the ability to annotate digital texts (Noel & Robert, 2004; Kim & Eklundh, 2001; Swarts, 2004).

Zheng et al. (2006) explain that “Basic annotations are edits (insertions and deletions) and comments on specific parts of the document” (p. 131). For example, collaborators using Microsoft Word can account for the insertions and deletions made to a document, attributed to a collaborator, by using the track changes feature and can provide feedback by inserting comments. Wolfe & Neuwirth (2001) identified four functions of annotations which include:

1. To facilitate reading and later writing tasks (e.g., by making self-directed annotations while reading;
2. To eavesdrop on the insights of other readers (e.g., by examining annotations made by previous readers of a text);

3. To provide feedback to writers or promote communication with collaborators (e.g. by making annotations while reading that are directed to other authors); and

4. To call attention to topic and important passages (e.g., by making annotations while authoring that are directed to the readers). (p. 336-7)

Cadiz et al. (2000) conducted a study to investigate the ways in which annotations are used to provide feedback during the document review process. More specifically, they studied how 450 people created 9000 annotations on 1243 documents (p. 309). Although their study contributes important statistical data about annotations, a limitation of their work is that they do not provide any summary information about the content of annotations. Albeit time consuming, the researchers would need to present findings from conducting a content analysis of the 9000 annotations to provide evidence of their claim of the annotations lack richness in content (p. 317).

Cadiz et al. (2000) are not the only researchers to claim that annotation systems constrain substantive collaboration. Moreover, Weng & Gennari (2004) and Zheng et al. (2006) propose innovative annotation models to mediate the document review process. For instance, Weng & Gennari (2004) argue the efficacy of their activity-oriented annotation model based upon its ability to collect pertinent information and generate reports to inform users of the ways in which annotations are and are not used (p. 567).
Even though the primary aim of the researchers is to advocate for the development of their annotation model, the 11 features of the model could also be used as a heuristic for future qualitative research concerning annotations. More specifically, these features include: context, message body, annotation creator, annotation recipient, annotation time, response deadline, responses, status, category, rating and urgency (Weng & Gennari, 2004, p. 565-6). Identifying these features accounts for the longevity of a text and emphasize a process approach to writing which is a limitation in existing research.

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

The literature review presented in this chapter demonstrates the unique features of this dissertation by situating this study in multiple gaps in existing scholarship. From a rhetoric and composition perspective, little is known about the function and construction of corporate communications and even fewer studies have examined the ways in which professional communicators in a corporate setting craft such texts. Given the popularity of workplace collaborative writing, it is surprising that more studies have not investigated the multiple ways in which professional communicators collaborate and, more specifically, how they engage in the document review process. Research pertaining to annotations, as a collaborative technology, appears to still be in its infancy. As such, the findings of this dissertation can contribute valuable information about the specific ways in which professional communicators use
annotations during document review to collaboratively construct employee publications on a continual basis.
Midwest Utility’s internal communications department is responsible for writing, designing, editing, and publishing five internal newsletters: *Company News, Unity, Delivery News, Nuclear News, and Generating News*. The *Company News* and *Unity* newsletters are chiefly written by members of the publications and video group, which is a subset of the internal communications department. These two publications contain information that is pertinent to all Midwest Utility employees. The communication accounts group is responsible for producing the *Delivery News, Nuclear News, and Generating News* newsletters which cater to specific business units within the organization (Midwest Utility Operating Companies, Midwest Utility Nuclear Power, and Midwest Utility Generation, respectively). Regardless of the newsletters’ intended audience, each of these publications is perceived as authoritative communication vehicles in which the Midwest Utility’s key messages are articulated. As such, the primary communicative function of these newsletters is to inform employees of the corporation’s financial and operating successes, strong focus on safety, position on regulatory and legislative activities, efforts to improve transmission and distribution reliability, and important achievements and milestones.
An appreciation for the integral role newsletters serve at Midwest Utility motivated me to investigate how six professional communicators collaboratively construct the *Delivery News* newsletter. Determining this research scope was also influenced by the fact that the newsletter writing process has received little attention in the field of writing studies. As Blyler (1990) argues “we do not have a body of theory about newsletter *writing*, of particular interest to those of us, trained in rhetoric and composition, who teach professional communication” (emphasis in original, p. 140). Within this group, the newsletter writing process is complicated by the fact the professional communicators work in three different offices located across three states. Consequently, researching the professional communicators’ collaborative process afforded the opportunity to interrogate newsletter writing as it occurs in distributed collaboration.

This chapter begins with a description of Midwest Utility’s large communication sector and how work is distributed across multiple departments and groups. Doing so contextualizes how the professional communicators and the *Delivery News* newsletter functions within the organization. In attempt to ensure methodological validity, three different data sets were obtained. Specifically, this chapter explains how observational data, interview data and documents were collected. Of particular interest were the digital copies of article drafts because they contained comments inserted by the professional communicators during the document review process. Curiosity and the opportunity to discern specific instantiations of collaboration motivated the
construction of a data corpus (“the comment corpus”). The process of compiling the comment corpus and rationale to limit data analysis to this data is described in detail. The latter part of the chapter argues why a grounded theory methodological approach was adopted for data analysis. This rationale is followed by an explanation of how grounded theory was utilized.

3.1 Midwest Utility’s Communication Sector

Midwest Utility’s large communication sector is responsible for meeting the corporation’s various communication needs. Specifically, the communications sector is responsible for five major initiatives which include:

1. communicating Midwest Utility’s financial and operating successes, with a strong focus on safety, position on regulatory and legislative activities, and efforts to improve transmission and distribution reliability,

2. providing communications that support business units- promoting key milestones as well as the ongoing efforts to produce electricity in an environmentally sound manner,

3. providing effective internal communications that will support managers’ efforts to deliver key messages to employees,

4. providing effective marketing, and
5. providing customers with high-quality production services and support on time and under budget.²

Addressing these multiple needs is complicated due to Midwest Utility’s complex organizational structure. To combat its decentralized structure, the majority of professional communicators employed in the communications sector work in the corporate headquarters. Additionally, to organize the way in which initiatives are met, the communications sector is comprised of three different departments: 1. external communications, 2. communication services, and 3. internal communications.

Both the external communication and communication services departments are responsible for creating communications to an external audience. The primary delineation is that the external communications department is in charge of media relations. Specifically, the external communications department utilizes outside venues to promote Midwest Utility in a positive light by engaging in different public relation strategies. To do so, professional communicators are charged with the responsibility of crafting news releases, letters to the editor, press kits, and facts sheets for public consumption. The department also organizes and facilitates editorial board visits, executive leadership interviews, media tours, and reporter visits.

The communication services department is also accountable for external communications and ensures compliance with corporate identity standards. To do so,

² This text is quoted from the communication sector’s communication strategy document that Beverly provided me with on my first site visit.
the department provides support to executive leadership and spearheads campaign efforts. For instance, members of the communications services department prepare speeches, presentations, talking points, letters and other communication materials for executives as well as provide strategic input and counsel to executives regarding these and other communication opportunities that help enhance the organization’s image. Concerning marketing, the department is in charge of planning and managing advertising programs and sponsorships that build brand awareness and enhance the corporation’s image among key audiences which include both internal and external audiences. Catering to an internal audience, the department manages the employee merchandising program and production services of those goods. Additionally, the department is in charge of working with outside vendors to produce these goods and other marketing tools.

The role of the internal communications department is to create and distribute employee communications that convey Midwest Utility’s values, goals, and objectives and position on key issues. To operationalize these concepts, internal communication department employees plan and organize executive leadership site visits, employee events, and major meetings. To supplement these interactions they also emphasize key messages through internal newsletters, videos, company intranet, and company website.

Communications Accounts. The internal communications department is subdivided into two groups: communications accounts and publications and video. This
project focuses on the communication accounts group, which itself comprises two teams: communication accounts and generation communications. Figure 3.1 illustrates how the communications accounts group is situated within the larger communication sector.

Over the course of the project, the manager of the communications accounts group, Beverly, was promoted to co-director of the internal communications department. After Beverly’s promotion, Linda was promoted to lead supervisor and assumed some of Beverly’s past managerial duties. Besides Beverly and Linda, Katie, Lauren, and Delilah also worked in the communications accounts group.
One of the primary responsibilities of this group is to provide communication support to Midwest Utility’s business units. Rationale as to which professional communicator supports which business unit is largely dependent on the professional communicators’ physical location. More specifically, three of the professional communicators work in the corporate office: Beverly, Linda and Lauren. Amy also worked in the corporate headquarters but belonged to publications and video group. Katie and Delilah, members of the communications accounts group, worked in offices.
located in two different states. Specifically, they both worked at Midwest Utility Electric Companies offices that were located in different service areas and therefore, represented the two different operating companies. Members of the generation communications team, Mary, Don, and Jessica worked at Nuclear Power Station 3, Nuclear Power Station 1 and Nuclear Power Station 2, respectively (Table 3.1).

| Table 3.1: Geographic locations of Professional Communicators |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Corporate headquarters | Midwest Utility Operating Electric Companies |
| Beverly          | Katie            |
| Linda            | Delilah          |
| Lauren           |                  |
| Amy              |                  |

**Research Participants.** Research participants are the professional communicators who collaborated on the internal newsletter *Delivery News*. In total, six people were responsible for constructing this newsletter: Beverly, Lisa, Amy, Lauren, Delilah, and Katie.

During 2009, both Beverly and Linda assumed editorial responsibilities for the *Delivery News* newsletter at different times. The chief responsibility of the editor was to manage the team of writers and to provide final approval for the final articles and publications. Copy editing duties were relegated to Amy who worked in the publications and video group.

The majority of the *Delivery News* newsletter was written by Lauren, Katie, and Delilah. However, either Beverly or Lisa would write most of the lead stories for the
publication if and when the story appeared to be written by a member of the executive leadership of Midwest Utility Electrical Companies business unit. Specifically, they functioned as ghost writers for sector presidents and these articles would appear on the first page of the newsletter. In addition to including articles that included messages from executive leadership, the common themes of *Delivery News* included, but not limited to, safety, customer service, environmental issues, human resource issues, and community involvement. As a means to organize coverage of issues, each writer was assigned a content and physical area to write about. Specifically, Lauren wrote about safety issues, Katie wrote customer service related pieces, and Delilah wrote about human resource topics. Each of these writers also worked in a different state and therefore was responsible for writing articles that pertained to her respective state.

3.2 Data

The following section includes a description of the data collected in attempt to answer the research question “How do six professional communicators collaboratively construct the *Delivery News* newsletter?” Specifically, collected data includes fieldnotes, interview data, and documents. Fieldnotes documented specific situations that I observed and functioned as a way to familiarize myself, as an outsider, with the contextual features that motivated, influenced, and directed textual production. Interviews were conducted to obtain information about the research participants, their
writing processes, and, when necessary, provide clarification. Procured documents include *Delivery News* newsletters and newsletter article drafts. The purpose for procuring three distinct data sets was to ensure methodological triangulation. However, it is important to address that this dissertation is, primarily, a corpus driven study. Therefore, this section also includes a description of how the data corpus was built, its features, and a rationale for selecting it as the primary data source.

**Fieldnotes.** Although the research participants were not physically in the same room, listening to 11 weekly conference calls was one way to observe and listen to the ways in which the research participants interacted. More specifically, during the weekly conference call I would sit in Beverly’s office, observe interactions between Beverly and Lauren, and listen to the conversations between Beverly, Lauren, Katie, and Delilah. As summarized by Silverman (2006), there were four primary reasons for observing these situations which included the ability to (1): “view events, actions, norms, [and] values” from the research participants’ perspective, (2): “attend to the mundane detail” as a way to “understand what is going on in a particular context and to provide clues and pointers to other layers of reality”, (3): understand events as they are “situated in a wider social and historical context” and (4): view “social life as involving interlocking series of events” (p. 68).

In addition to these broader notions of social practice, listening to weekly conference calls afforded opportunities to document specific instances of the social dynamics within the group which included their “pre- and posttask activities, team
formation, and planning” (Lowry et al., 2004, p. 72). Due to their varied office locations, the Delivery News writers could not accomplish these tasks in face-to-face exchanges. Instead, the professional communicators would engage in these activities during their weekly conference calls. Understanding that such interactions were integral to the study, conference calls were documented with great detail in fieldnotes.

During conference calls, Beverly, Delilah, Lauren, and Katie would discuss the communication needs of the Midwest Utility Electric Companies business unit and plan upcoming editions of Delivery News. The rationale for weekly conference calls is two-fold. Specifically, Delilah, Lauren, and Katie had only worked together for about five months when I first began my fieldwork investigations. Moreover, because the professional locators did not all work in the same office, weekly conference calls functioned as one way to develop and maintain social relationships.

Because of the group’s relatively new status, the conference calls provided an opportunity to discuss the general scope and function of a newsletter and ways to improve the publication. For instance, during one call the Delivery News writers brainstormed ways to standardize the newsletter by examining the content of previous editions and determined how to proceed with a better defined scope for the newsletter. Additionally, they discussed ways to brand the newsletter by identifying and naming specific features to be included in each newsletter and designing logos to accompany those articles. For example, Figure 3.2 is a page from my fieldnotes in which Delilah was noting that in one newsletter a note of appreciation sent from a customer appeared
under the heading “Customer Kudos” and in the following publication the header
“Customer Compliments” was used for a similar submission.
Figure 3.2: Example of Conference Call Fieldnotes

L: Green circuits → next month's dispatch
back squeeze
v. tech

D: v. tech → Ø popular w/ management
false sense of security

B: when to roll out v. tech & what communications
will surrounds it

Urban development story pulled back of
audience considerations: B- assuming the
audience already knows a lot.

L: ED safety form: use for monthly safety report
w/ populated fields

D: e-mail
struck me abt. inconsistencies
Verbage: Customer Kudos | Customer Compliments
During these conference calls, the social and power dynamics between the professional communicators became apparent. Because both conference calls occurred on Mondays, it was not surprising that group started the meeting by discussing what they did over the weekend. Beverly would direct the *Delivery News* calls. In doing so, she would prompt each professional communicator to provide an update with the purpose of avoiding a situation in which people might talk over one another. Team members would frequently help one another during these calls. Such help included identifying an accessible subject matter expert, reference document, or offering to help with a particular task. What was equally interesting was what was absent from these calls. Specifically, the professional communicators never addressed perceived problems with an article or document during the conference calls.

Listening to the weekly newsletter conference calls provided valuable insight about the social processes related to the construction of newsletters and the ways in which the organizational context in which it was embedded influenced and directed how specific messages were crafted. Specifically, it was not uncommon for the professional communicators to justify the inclusion of an article by situating its purpose as contributing to a particular communication strategy.

**Interviews.** Research participants were interviewed in order to understand their role in the collaborative construction of the *Delivery News* newsletter. Table 3.2 identifies the research participants that were interviewed and the dates on which the interviews were conducted. Beverly was interviewed the most, 10 times, because most
research visits began and ended in her office. The ten interviews identified in Table 3.2 were those in which a sustained dialogue concerning Delivery News production was the topic of discussion. Lauren was interviewed a total of six times throughout the duration of fieldwork investigations. An interview was conducted with Delilah on August 23, 2009 during a visit to her office. Only one visit occurred due to the fact that her office is located over 450 miles from the corporate headquarters. In total, 13 hours were spent conducting 17 interviews with these three research participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Interview Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>April 13, 2009; April 20, 2009; April 30, 2009; May 11, 2009; May 15, 2009; June 22, 2009; June 24, 2009; August 8, 2009; January 14, 2010; May 7, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>April 13, 2009; May 18, 2009; June 12, 2009; July 13, 2009; August 7, 2009; January 14, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>August 23, 2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To better understand their roles within the group, background information such as educational background, previous writing experience, job history, and how long they worked at Midwest Utility was solicited during the first interview. Subsequent interviews were less structured. Specifically, following interviews consisted of open-ended questions in order to gain the research participants’ insight and opinions as they were described in their own language. Silverman (2006) refers to this as emotionalist interview data because “interviewees are viewed as experiencing subjects who actively
construct their social worlds” and, therefore, the data provides “an authentic insight into people’s experiences” (p. 118). Using Kvale’s (1996) examples of interview questions as a guide, Table 3.3 illustrates the types of interview questions and examples posed to the research participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Type</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introducing questions</td>
<td>“Can you explain the overall process for producing the Delivery News newsletter?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up questions</td>
<td>“Can you explain your role in the production of Delivery News?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing questions</td>
<td>“Can you describe your process for writing newsletter articles?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifying questions</td>
<td>“How do you approach a subject matter expert for information?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct questions</td>
<td>“Do you think Delivery News is an important communication vehicle?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect questions</td>
<td>“What are strategies for effective collaboration?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting questions</td>
<td>“So, for you, effective collaboration includes active participation by all members of the group?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would have been preferred that all six professional communicators who collaboratively produced the Delivery News newsletter throughout 2009 were interviewed. However, for the following reasons, Amy, Katie and Linda were not formally interviewed.

Pertaining to the overall collaborative process of producing Delivery News, Amy’s participation was limited to copyediting newsletter article drafts via computer mediated communication. As such, she did not engage in any other group activities and was, relatively, isolated from the article writers and editors. For these reasons, limited

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3 Question types were obtained from Kvale’s (1996) InterViews: An Introduction to qualitative research interviewing (p. 133-35). Examples were modified from those provided in the text to illustrate specific questions posed to the research participants.
contact and interactions occurred during field investigations. A reason a more concerted effort was not made to interview Amy was due to the fact that Beverly was not her manager. To avoid overstepping boundaries, in general, interactions were limited to the professional communicators that Beverly supervised as she was the one who initially agreed to participate in the study and granted access to specific events.

Efforts were made to schedule an interview with Katie who worked 180 miles from the corporate headquarters but due Katie’s ongoing personal issues scheduling a visit was not feasible.

Regular site visits occurred from April 13, 2009 to August 7, 2009 and for this duration Beverly acted as the editor of the publication. As documented in the newsletter article drafts, Linda began assuming an editorial role for the August 25th newsletter. Prior to August, Linda did not participate in the textual production of Delivery News and, therefore, was not initially identified as a research participant or approached for an interview.

Documents. The document data set includes the 13 editions of Delivery News published in 2009, which totaled 127 pages. The median newsletter length was 8 pages and contained an average of 16 articles. The average word length of an article was about 250 words. Table 3.4 identifies the page count and number of articles for each edition of Delivery News.
Table 3.4: *Delivery News* Data Set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication Date</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
<th>Number of Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.28.09</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.31.09</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.09</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>6.26.09</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *Delivery News* newsletter is collaboratively constructed by six professional communicators who work in the communication accounts group. The publication was created to provide a consistent forum for executive leadership to disseminate information because previously numerous newsletters were published by employees who did not work in the communication sector. Instead, these newsletters were written by employees who worked in an operating company and the newsletter content reflected this singular perspective. Having field employees, not affiliated with the internal communications department, assume the responsibility of disseminating information from a seemingly corporate standpoint was problematic. More specifically, some of the newsletter content was inaccurate, not cleared by the legal department, and, consequently, did not contribute to the larger mission of the communication sector. To ensure uniformity amongst all communication tools, the communications
accounts group created the *Delivery News* newsletter to cater to all employees who work in the Midwest Utility Electric Companies business unit.

Newsletters are used as a primary communication vehicle because they are portable documents that can easily be circulated. Specifically, the newsletter is distributed via e-mail to Midwest Utility Electric Companies business unit employees and archived on the company intranet. However, a substantial number of employees, such as meter readers and linemen, work in the field and do not have regular access to a computer. In these situations, supervisors will print newsletters and leave them in the office to ensure that field employees have access to the newsletters.

In addition to the 13 editions of *Delivery News* newsletters, this data set also includes 1,395 newsletter article drafts composed to produce the 205 articles included in the publications. Of the 205 published articles, there were five that were not reviewed by the group and for those articles, no evidence of how drafts were composed was available. Therefore, the least number of drafts that an article underwent was zero. The most drafts generated for one newsletter article was 16 drafts. The average article underwent seven drafts. To further illustrate the range of how many article drafts were written to construct a newsletter, Table 3.5 identifies the number of drafts each article underwent to produce the March 31\textsuperscript{st} edition of *Delivery News*. 
Table 3.5: Number of Article Drafts for March 31 Delivery News Edition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Title</th>
<th>Number of Drafts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Importance of a Great Team</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety Corner: Warning: This Fabric Could Save your Life</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety is for Life</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Matt Thomas It’s Not Just a Job – It’s an Adventure!</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking Ahead Pays Off for Customers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substation Works Nine Years OSHA Free</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating Safety Milestones</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Green is Your Business?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Kudos</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBEW Employees</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the Challenges of Energy Efficiency Legislation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUC Commissioner Discusses Mind Over Meter</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity Planning Process: Work Prioritization (part 3 of 5)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring Counts – Just Ask David Sisson</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MU Health Emergency Program Offers On-site Health Assessments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black History Month Touches Local Communities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest Utility Receives Two EEI Awards</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What constituted an article draft was determined by the research participants. More specifically, each time a professional communicator would review a draft she would insert the document version and her initials into the document header. Figure 3.3 illustrates an example of a document header that informs the reader of the review process for that document and the document version number. Specifically, this header documents that Katie was the article author and the order in which the professional communicators reviewed the document was: Delilah, Lauren, Amy, Katie, and Amy.
Comment Corpus. The most salient feature of the article drafts was the inclusion of comments. More specifically, the professional communicators utilize the comment feature afforded in Microsoft Word to address issues and concerns about the text. To do so, the professional communicator would highlight the text in which they wanted to critique and select the “new comment” icon located under the “review” tab. This action would result in the appearance of a color coded comment balloon and would include the professional communicator’s initials.

I built a corpus, henceforth referred to as the comment corpus, by reading all 1,395 article drafts and identifying comment balloons. The comment balloon, as a discrete unit of analysis, could contain more than one comment. It was a common practice among these professional communicators to respond to one another within these comment balloons. For the purpose of this study, what constituted a comment
was not defined by the graphic space of the comment balloon but rather how the professional communicators used that space to communicate. For example, Figure 3.4 illustrates a scenario in which Delilah asks Lauren to spell out an acronym in the second draft of an article. In the third draft, Lauren responds to this query within the same comment balloon. I was able to discern Lauren’s comment as a separate exchange because she prefaced her response by inserting her initials. Because the professional communicators frequently used the comment balloons as a place to engage in a dialogue, they were all accustomed to adding their own initials to indicate authorship. As a result of this practice, each comment could be attributed to one of the professional communicator and, therefore, provided a way to identify comments. How comments were defined was also in accordance with how the professional communicators recognized and referred to comments. Specifically, comments were temporally-bound commentary inserted by a professional communicator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 3.4: Identifying Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delilah’s comment:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comment [DB2]:</strong> Can you spell this out – I don’t know what it stands for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lauren’s comment:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comment [DB2]:</strong> Can you spell this out – I don’t know what it stands for. LK it doesn’t stand for anything it is the name of the company that takes collection calls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 677 comments were identified in the article draft data set. The comment corpus was organized in chronological order starting with comments for the
February 7th edition and ending with comments for the December 9th edition of *Delivery News*. Data listed in the corpus included: publication date, article author, article title, comment author, and comment.

The principal reason that the comment corpus was chosen as the primary data set to be analyzed is that relatively little is known about the writing processes and collaborative response practices of professional communicators. As such, the comment corpus provides evidence of the specific ways in which professional communicators collaboratively construct an integral corporate document from different geographical locations. Specifically, because they work in offices located across three states, the group utilizes various technological tools to mediate collaboration. It became evident through observations, interviews, and access to article drafts that collaboration focusing on specific textual elements most often occurred through the use of Microsoft Word and the company shared drive. In their capacity as professional communicators, it was a purposeful decision to use these technological tools because it was best suited to their needs. Participating in computer mediated communication and more specifically their practice of inserting comments enabled them to “talk” on the page. As such, they were able to overcome spatial constraints and collaborate in a way that was not temporally bound.

Identifying comments to build the comment corpus codified their collaborative response practices and, thus, made the activity of collaboration a material artifact that could be analyzed. As such, the comment corpus is representative of authentic
collaboration as it occurred between professional communicators. Although the
research participants were aware that I had obtained digital copies of all article drafts,
only Beverly knew that I narrowed the research scope to analyze comments.
Additionally, by the time that the research scope had been limited to comments,
Beverly had been promoted and had limited involvement in the document review
process. Due to these facts, it can be assumed that little to no research participant
reactivity occurred as a result of how the data was collected. As Schooler et al. (1993)
explain reactivity is “when subjects attempted to articulate information that would not
otherwise have been heeded” and, therefore, is one way in which a researcher can
influence participants’ behavior and skew the data (p. 167). In addition to the research
participants’ having limited knowledge about how the data would be analyzed, an
additional measure taken to ensure the validity of the comment corpus was the decision
to analyze an entire year’s worth of comments. Moreover, a longitudinal account of the
professional communicators’ collaborative response practices ensured that discerned
patterns and strategies that emerged from the comment corpus were consistent and
not idiosyncratic.

As a result of how the data was collected and organized, the comment corpus
affords a unique opportunity to analyze the specific ways in which professional
communicators collaboratively construct a corporate document between various
locations and across time. The authenticity of the comment corpus presented multiple
options for analysis. Specifically, comments were analyzed to discern their constituent
features which included comment referent and commenting strategies. Additionally, comments were also contextualized in that analysis also accounted for the ways in which comments did or did not affect the text which was represented by the development of the comment function category.

The opportunity to analyze the comment corpus at varying levels of abstraction is a significant endeavor. Specifically, such access to corporate writing is unprecedented. As Cross (1994) notes, it:

- is exceedingly difficult for a researcher to obtain access in such contexts, especially because the forms and uses of writing may be virtually inseparable from information considered crucial to economic competitiveness. Trust on the part of corporation executives must be substantial, then, that the researcher will not reveal information that could compromise the economic competitiveness of the corporation in general or that of a subunit within the corporation (p. xi).

Building trust and rapport with the research participants was an involved process. Specifically, Beverly was approached in April 2008, a full year prior to regular site visits, to discuss the possibility of conducting research at Midwest Utility. From April 2008 to April 2009, regular contact with Beverly was maintained via e-mail to keep her abreast of the status of the research project. In the beginning of April 2009, I met with the director of the internal communications department to discuss the research design. The conversation also included issues such as confidentiality and anonymity as they were
explicitly expressed in a human research subjects form approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. Additionally, I was also required to sign an acknowledgement, confidentially, and indemnification agreement with Midwest Utility.

An affordance of making contact with the research participants in advance was that the motivations and objectives of this research were firmly established and issues of access were addressed prior to conducting field investigations. For the first 15 weeks of site visits, an average of 20 hours was spent at Midwest Utility. It was due, in part, to the extensive amount of time spent with the research participants and becoming a regular feature in some of their activities, that a rapport was developed. As a result, I was entrusted with unprecedented access to numerous corporate documents of which includes the document data set previously described.

3.3 Data Analysis

In this section, I first present a rationale for using a grounded theory methodological approach to analyze the comment corpus, which is followed by an explanation of how the method was operationalized. I then address the potential issues that can arise from adopting a qualitative research design.

Rationale for Grounded Theory. The scope of this dissertation is to investigate the collaborative response practices that six professional communicators employ to construct the Delivery News newsletter. In doing so, the primary objective is to analyze
how collaboration occurs in relation to the organizational context in which such processes are embedded. To do so, it was necessary to adopt a qualitative research approach because such a design affords the ability to study individuals in a given environment, account for the processes as well as outcomes, and investigate meanings and causes (Silverman, 2001, p. 258).

Understanding that a research approach is inextricably linked to how and what types of data are collected, the comment corpus was chosen as the primary data set because it accounts for collaboration as a process. Grounded theory was chosen as a method to analyze the comment corpus because of its ability to systematically account for collaboration as a social process. As such, this methodological approach outlines a rigorous approach for how data needs to be analyzed to ensure that research findings are inductively derived from the data and, therefore, grounded. Included in this process is identifying “strategies devised to manage, handle, carry out, respond to a phenomenon under a specific set of perceived conditions” which is one way to preserve chronology and consequences of collaboration (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). Lastly, an affordance of grounded theory is that research findings are grounded in specific datum and, therefore, not the result of theoretical impositions. A constraint of applying theoretical constructs to a data set is that it can potentially limit and restrict findings. Because grounded theory espouses the use of coding procedures as a means for data analysis, what emerges from the data is representative of the social phenomenon under study opposed to findings that conform to predetermined constructs.
**Application of Grounded Theory.** As informed by Strauss (1987) and Strauss & Corbin (1990), a grounded theory methodological approach was used to analyze the comment corpus. Grounded theory is an iterative and cumulative process of analyzing and interpreting data by constantly comparing and contrasting as well as fracturing and repairing the data throughout the three primary coding procedures which include open, axial, and selective coding. The progression of coding procedures results in the abstraction of data which yields a substantive theory that explains how a particular social phenomenon occurs within a specific context.

The process of data analysis begins with open coding which is the first step in conceptualizing the data. More specifically, the process begins by noting the constituent features of the data and grouping like data to create conceptual codes. Fracturing the data to develop conceptual codes can result in “dozens, even hundreds of conceptual labels” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 65). Therefore, it is necessary to then further abstract the data by developing categories. The process of developing categories begins by comparing and contrasting conceptual codes to interrogate the ways in which they do or do not relate to the same phenomena. It was during open coding that the categories of comment referent and commenting strategies emerged from the comment corpus as a ways to account for the topic of and construction of comments.

Taken together, the comment referent and commenting strategies categories provided a way to document and describe *what and how* issues were addressed within
comments. However, a limitation of both categories was that neither accounted for the complex interactions that occurred between the professional communicators throughout the article drafts. This need to document the exchanges that took place on the page is what Strauss & Corbin (1990) refer to as opening up the data (p. 94). This process of deliberating potential categories and lines of inquiry was documented in coding memos.

For example, Figure 3.5 is an excerpt from a coding memo written on July 27, 2009. The purpose of the memo was to catalyze ideas to represent the data at a more abstract level and move from merely describing what occurred in the comments to explaining how the professional communicators used the comments as a way to engage in a dialogue. In attempt to better understand the relationship between comments and the article drafts in which they were embedded, a coding scheme was developed to ascertain each comments’ ostensible function.
A phenomenon that I have identified but have not explored is the instances when these professional communicators use the comment balloon as a space to engage in a dialogue. The impetus for these exchanges can be attributed to the comment content. Based upon the issues being addressed in the comment is also, it seems, related to the professional communicators’ role and function within the group which may influence the way in which the comment is constructed. However, the content and function categories are insufficient in that they do not describe types of activities consistent in the corpus. Therefore, a pertinent question to be posed is *What are features of collaboration as they exist in the corpus?*

Two concepts that might explain how and why exchanges occur on the page are conflict and cooperation which are inherent features of collaboration. Burnett (1991) explains that “Two of the factors that make collaborative writing sessions successful are conflict and cooperation” (emphasis in original, p. 533). To further explore how these two concepts could be appropriated and developed into categories, I will return to the comment corpus to investigate if conflict and/or cooperation are predominant features.

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**Figure 3.5: Excerpt from Coding Memo**

As suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1990), a generative technique for postulating different ways in which data can be represented is to consult existing scholarship because it “can be used to stimulate theoretical sensitivity by providing concepts and relationships that are checked out against actual data” (emphasis added, Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 50). The operative phrase ‘actual data’ is important to note because forcing or imposing concepts onto to the data negates a principal tenet of grounded theory that findings must be inductively derived from the data. For this reason, concepts
presented in relevant research were not appropriated to describe the data but instead ways to explain emergent patterns.

When done purposefully, borrowing prevailing concepts from pertinent research can enhance theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 51). For instance, conflict and cooperation are two popular concepts discussed in workplace writing collaboration (Burnett, 1991; Cross, 1994). The excerpted memo (Figure 3.6) provides insight into the decision making process to appropriate Burnett’s (1991) concepts of conflict and cooperation and develop into categories to undergo axial coding. To do so, a manageable subset of article drafts were selected, using an online resource (randomizer.org), and include the March 31st, June 2nd, and November 11th publications.

Strauss & Corbin (1990) summarize the axial coding process as “specifying a category (phenomenon) in terms of the conditions that give rise to it; the context in which it is embedded; the action/interactional strategies by which it is handled, managed, carried out; and the consequences of those strategies” (p. 97). In addition to the “hypothetical relating of subcategories to a category by means of denoting the nature of the relationships between them and the phenomenon” the axial coding process is further complicated by the need to operationalize three other distinct analytic steps simultaneously (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.107). These steps include “the verification of those hypotheses against actual data; the continued search for the properties of categories and subcategories, and the dimensional locations of data indicative of them; the beginning exploration of variation in phenomena, by comparing
and contrasting each category and its subcategories for different patterns discovered by comparing dimensional locations of instances of data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 107).

Conflict, as a category, was defined as comments that expressed disagreement about content and rhetorical elements (Burnett, 1991, p. 533). The cooperation category was defined as instances in which a reviewer provided a suggestion(s) and the article author agreed with the comment and made changes to the text accordingly. Identifying and analyzing instances of cooperation and conflict afforded the opportunity to more fully understand some of the strategies these professional communicators employ during collaboration. However, developing these categories independently of one another proved problematic. More specifically, the data reflected instances in which exchanges that discussed a specific portion of the text contained evidence of both cooperation and conflict. Therefore, an unnatural distinction had been imposed on the data by coding exchanges as either cooperation or conflict. To resolve this issue, the negotiation category was developed as a way to understand the dialectical nature of cooperation and conflict. Figure 3.6 illustrates how categories were conceptualized at this point in data analysis process.
As a result of hypothesizing the interrelatedness of all categories, the methodological move was made to identify communicative responsibility as the core category. Communicative responsibility, as the core category, explains how the professional communicators create a shared meaning and/or understanding of effective communication via their collaborative response practices. Doing so signaled the transition from axial coding to selective coding in which the relationship between category and subcategories could be analyzed.
Selective coding is the final coding procedure for building a site specific theory that depicts a rich and grounded representation of contextualized social phenomenon. The primary objective of selective coding is “selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116).

The core category is the integration of all categories and subcategories and results in a conceptual construct that encapsulates the central phenomenon as it occurs within a specific context. Throughout the comment corpus, the core category that emerged as a salient feature and way to describe how the professional communicators established meaning via their collaborative response practices was that of communicative responsibility. The most complex way in which communicative responsibility was manifested in the professional communicators’ collaborative response practices was their frequent practice of questioning the implications of newsletter content.

*Limitations of Research Design.* As Faigley (1985) predicted “Because qualitative research offers the potential for describing the complex social situation that any act of writing involves, empirical researchers are likely to use qualitative approaches with frequency” (p. 243). More specifically, this dissertation was designed as a qualitative case study because of its multiple affordances which include the ability to provide: (1) “a holistic view of an event or situation that includes the context as well as the details of an individual events,” (2) “rich detail that can lead to a more complete understanding of some aspect of a person, group, event, or situation,” (3) affective information that
cannot otherwise be collected,” and (4) the opportunity “to explore a problem that is not well defined or understood” (MacNealy, 1997, p. 184). MacNealy (1997) summarizes the efficacy of case study research by claiming that “a case study of a particular person [or group] doing a particular task with a particular type of equipment could contribute in several ways to a body of knowledge that would be extremely useful to both practitioners and professional communication teachers” (p. 184). Additionally, Lay & Karis (1991) argue that “Case studies have greatly furthered our understanding of not only how writers write, but also what implications their writing and behavior may have within their respective organizations and disciplines” (emphasis in original, p.83). However, as Patton (2002) warns “There are no perfect research designs. There are always trade-offs” (p. 223). Therefore, it is necessary to address the limitations associated with the research design of this dissertation.

A limitation of qualitative research, in general, is that it can be flawed by a researcher’s subjectivity. Specifically, Denzin & Lincoln (2000) explain that “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” which “means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Furthermore, this process consists of multiple “interpretive, material practices” to yield a “series of representations” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Inherently, subjectivity is woven into each of these data collection methods as the researcher functions as a filter for what and how data is collected and analyzed. Furthermore, Lauer & Sullivan (1993)
explain that “all empirical research [is a] partial representations or perspectives that are adequations but never equal to the primary experience” (p.164). As such, there are multiple factors that can influence what, when, and how data is collected.

In attempt to limit researcher subjectivity, multiple procedures were built into the research design. During each stage of the research there was a conscious effort “to step back and critically analyze situations, to recognize and avoid bias, to obtain valid and reliable data, and to think abstractly” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 18). Specifically, in order to procure valid and reliable data the research design included methodological triangulation and combining qualitative and quantitative approaches.

MacNealy (1999) suggests that researchers “use triangulation so that more than one measure will converge on an issue” to increase the respectability of a case study (p. 202). As previously described, the primary data set analyzed in this dissertation is the comment corpus which was built by identifying comments that appeared throughout newsletter article drafts. Observational and interview data were used to contextual and clarify the findings. As a material artifact, the comment corpus is representative of texts that were “recorded without the intervention of a researcher” (Silverman, 2006, p. 153). Consequently, “it can be examined by others to allow verifications of findings” (MacNealy, 1999, p. 201).

As quoted in Miles & Huberman, Rossman & Wilson (1984, 1991) advocate that to enhance the validity of qualitative research both qualitative and quantitative data should be linked throughout the research process because doing so enables
“confirmation or corroboration of each other via triangulation” (1994, p. 41). For instance, they claim that “During data analysis quantitative data can help by showing the generality of specific observations, correcting the ‘holistic fallacy,’ and verifying or casting new light on qualitative findings” (emphasis in original, p. 41). In this dissertation, a coding scheme was developed to account for the constituent features of comments (a thorough discussion of the coding scheme appears in Chapter 4). In doing so, categories and codes were developed which provided an opportunity to quantify the data by “counting the number instances that [fell] into each category” (Silverman, 2006, p. 159). Thus, future analysis was grounded in specific datum that could be verified.

The ability to reference specific datum in the development of a grounded theory is essential to refute the perceived limitation that grounded theory is a flawed approach to data analysis. As Silverman (2006) argues, when grounded theory is “Used unintelligently, it can also be degenerate into a fairly empty building of categories or into a mere smokescreen used to legitimize purely empiricist research” (p. 96). In response, it is imperative to note all findings were inductively derived from the data and, therefore, the “findings constitute a theoretical formulation of the reality under investigation, rather than consisting of a set of numbers, or a group of loosely related themes” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). To do so, concepts and relationships were “not only generated but . . . provisionally tested” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). Memos and graphic representations were produced to organize, record, and account for the methodological decisions made throughout data analysis. Additionally, specific data is
referenced throughout this dissertation to provide evidence and illustrate the nature of the data.

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented an argument for selecting the comment corpus as the primary data set because it accounted for the \textit{in situ} collaborative response practices employed by professional communicators. As such, it made the activity of collaboration a material artifact that could be analyzed at varying levels of abstraction. Moreover, because the comment corpus consisted of specific comments provided by professional communicators in their own language, the data set provided an opportunity to discern specific features of the comments such as language construction. As evidenced by the core category of communicative responsibility, the comment corpus also captured the inherent complexities of a particular social phenomenon. Speaking to this, Mabrito (1992) asserts that “computer-mediated communication can foster a sense of community among participants” and that “this ‘sense of community’ affords the opportunity “to view computer-mediated collaborative writing as more than just an efficient vehicle for sharing and responding to texts but rather, as in face-to-face encounters, an environment where writing also becomes a ‘social act’” (p. 319).

Grounded theory was used to analyze the data because it afforded sensitivity to the social context in which the professional communicators’ collaborative response
practices are embedded. As quoted in Silverman (2006), Moisander & Valtonen suggest that two ways to ensure reliability in qualitative research is “by making the research process transparent through describing your research strategy and data analysis methods in a sufficiently detailed manner” and “by paying attention to ‘theoretical transparency’ through making the theoretical stance from which the interpretation takes place and showing how this produces particular interpretations and excludes others” (p. 282). Heeding this advice, this chapter addressed how grounded theory was used to analyze the comment corpus and, in doing so, provided examples of materials that documented and explained the methodological moves made.

Because grounded theory is not a theory, per se, but rather a method for data analysis, it does not impose theoretical constructs upon the data. However, Lauer & Sullivan (1993) argue that “researchers’ knowledge constructions are mediated” by many factors which include “prevailing theories of writing, language, and knowledge” (p. 166). Therefore, it was necessary to explicitly acknowledge the theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation when providing a rationale for the data sets and utilizing grounded theory.
Analyzing the comment corpus afforded the opportunity to discern the specific ways in which the professional communicators’ collaborative response practices yielded evidence of communicative responsibility. According to Aune et al. (2005) “communicative responsibility is based upon the assumption that people approach a communicative event with the implicit belief that their primary goal is to establish a state of shared meaning or understanding between themselves and that each communicator bears a measure of responsibility for bringing about that state” (p. 359). I argue that the fundamental precept that underpins the professional communicators’ collaborative response is this notion of communicative responsibility and, thus, why it was identified as the core category. Communicative responsibility, as a core category, provides a way to better understand how the professional communicators’ collaborative response practices are embedded in a social context. Said differently, the core category explains how this group is able to collaboratively make meaning in a digital environment. In addition to ascertaining the social context in which the document review process is situated, communicative responsibility provides verification of the multiple functions and implications of corporate communications.
As previously discussed, the professional communicators started the newsletter to cater to all Midwest Utility Operating Companies employees, who work across three different states, after learning that employees in different field locations were creating and distributing newsletters within their respective areas. As a result, Delivery News was created to serve as a primary communication vehicle to provide timely and credible information to all Midwest Utility Operating Companies employees. The newsletter also functions as a way to enculturate employees to appropriate a mindset that values and is committed to safety, customer satisfaction, reliability and financial performance that is driven by leadership, skill, diversity and character of its employees.

Akin to Winsor’s (1989) assertion that “writing is visibly used not to just record decisions and events but to do the organization’s work, to build its shared understanding, and to construct its knowledge,” the Delivery News newsletter is an effective medium used to build and maintain a cohesive business unit with a clear vision (p. 271). More specifically, each edition contains standard features that emphasize preferred attitudes and behaviors. For example, all editions include a section in which different employees are profiled and acknowledged for a specific situation in which they provided excellent customer service. In combination with articles that provide a pragmatic explanation of how employees should interact with customers in particular circumstance, the purpose of highlighting employees’ positive actions is to present the various ways in which employees can practice good customer service. Continuously, sponsoring and addressing key values is one way in which Delivery News attempts to
develop and maintain a team mentality among its readers to overcome the spatial constraints of the business unit that had previously isolated employees based upon their geographic location.

As a primary communication vehicle, the chief purpose of the newsletter is to provide timely information to all Midwest Utility Operating Companies employees. As such, the professional communicators include information that pertains to most, if not all, readers and, therefore, have an expectation that employees will engage and apply the material in purposeful ways. When used in this way, the monthly publication is only relevant until the next edition is published. However, a larger implication of Delivery News, as a textual artifact, is that serves as a material representation of both Midwest Utility Operating Companies and Midwest Utility. Barabas (1990) explains that “One of the most important and revealing ways in which an organization conveys and sustains its character is through its written communication” (p. 94). This notion is further complicated by the fact that newsletters are distributed as print and digital documents throughout the business unit. So even though the publication’s intended audience are employees, the professional communicators are acutely aware that any newsletter can be distributed to in the general public. Therefore, the professional communicators are meticulous when crafting articles that contain sensitive and potentially contentious content in the event that the material is made public.

The professional communicators’ ability to cater to their intended audience and consider unintended audiences is one of the reasons why they created the Delivery
News newsletter to replace the unauthorized newsletters that were being distributed throughout the business unit. Moreover, they are cognizant of how context influences the way in which communications are perceived and by extension the sophisticated ways to conceptualize audience considerations. Couture & Rymer (1993) argue that contextual awareness affects the composing strategies of professional writers and is a primary way to differentiate between professionals who write and professional writers. Specifically, they posit that “Situational exigency refers to the environmental factor in a social situation that is interpreted as a dominant demand by the writer” and “represents a primary motivation for writing behaviors in the workplace” (p. 7). In their capacity as professional communicators, their primary function is to write on behalf of the organization in response to operational needs. Perelman (1986) explains that professional communicators “exist largely as projections of institutional roles rather than idiosyncratic individuals” due to the fact although “an individual can personalize an institutional role, or institutional roles can be performed in quite different ways, . . . the extent to which a role can be personalized or the number of ways the role can be acted out are always limited by institutional rules an goals” (p. 474). Their ability to assume and write from a corporate perspective further distinguishes professional communicators from professional writers. Generally speaking, professionals who write contribute texts that support different business functions but serve an ancillary purpose when compared to the communicative function of texts produced by professional communicators.
Addressing the multiple functions and implications of corporate communications is necessary to more fully appreciate and contextualize the work of the professional communicators. For instance, rather than dismissing instances in which the professional communicators split hairs over seemingly surface level concerns such as a phrase or word because they appear trivial, it is more productive to interrogate the features of such exchanges to explore the larger contexts that influence, motivate and direct the professional communicators’ decisions. In part, the professional communicators attend to minute details because they understand that the communicative purpose of the Delivery News newsletter extends beyond functioning as a primary communication vehicle for the Midwest Utility Electric Companies business unit but also as a material representation of the entire organization.

Appreciating the organizational and social contexts in which their comments are situated elucidated the professional communicators’ deliberative collaborative efforts in which they assume the responsibility of creating and maintaining a consistent corporate image as it is manifested in written communication. Investigating the group’s document review process afforded opportunities to identify specific instantiations of their purposeful decisions as to the best way to represent the organization. Specifically, analyzing the professional communicators’ collaborative response practices led to the inductive development of a site specific collaboration heuristic.

The heuristic is a cumulative product of conducting multiple coding procedures. As such, it accounts for the basic features of comments such as comment referent (what
is being addressed) as well as the more abstract category of collaborative effects. The construct of collaborative effects is reappropriated from Bracewell’s & Witte’s (2003) argument about how to research theoretical constructs or “abstractions, which have the additional characteristic of having accrued explanatory power” (p. 522). The authors offer the following examples to clarify their argument “One cannot see, touch, hear, smell, or taste gravity when an apple falls from a tree . . . But one can observe the ‘effects’ of gravity” (p. 522).

However, prior to explaining how the progression of coding procedures resulted in the development of the collaboration heuristic and the core category of communicative responsibility, this chapter begins with a discussion of some of the observational and interview data collected. Specifically, this chapter begins by describing the typical process for constructing Delivery News as it was discerned during site visits and interviews. In addition to presenting a detailed account of the writing processes of professional communicators, providing an overview situates the document review process in the broader context of textual production.

4.1 Observational and Interview Data

The textual production of Delivery News is impacted by Midwest Utility’s decentralized structure. Specifically, the Delivery News newsletter caters to employees who work in the energy delivery and customer service sectors of the organization who
work throughout three Midwestern states. To ensure adequate coverage of pertinent information across geographical locations, this group of professional communicators employs two specific strategies. The first strategy is that each writer is responsible for a certain content area. Specifically, Delilah writes about human resource stories, Lauren writes about safety related issues, and Katie covers stories about customer service related issues. In addition to writing articles that pertain to human resource, safety, and customer service issues, additional themes that occurred throughout all 13 editions of *Delivery News* include reliability, environmental stewardship, and internal and external awards. Therefore, second strategy utilized to overcome spatial constraints is for Delilah, Lauren and Katie to write articles that pertain to their respective geographical locations.

The fact that each professional communicator is responsible for writing articles about a specific content and region is communicated to the *Delivery News* audience. On the last page of each edition, their respective coverage responsibility appears in a textbox and therefore informs the readers of whom they can contact if they want to contribute story ideas. Quite frequently, the professional communicators are contacted by other employees, who serve different functions in the corporation such as generalists, managers, directors, and executive leadership, about various events that have occurred or will occur within the organization. As such, these suggestions are one way in which the professional communicators generate ideas for articles.
Idea generation represents the first step in each professional communicator’s process for writing articles. After a professional communicator receives a story idea or comes up with a story idea on her own, she then informs the group via the weekly conference call. Each Monday afternoon, Delilah, Lauren, Katie, and Beverly and/or Linda would participate in the weekly call to brainstorm article ideas and discuss the development of the monthly newsletter.

Once article ideas were approved, the professional communicators would input their story ideas into an Excel spreadsheet housed on the shared drive. Doing so was one way to ensure that each writer paid equal attention to her respective area and content area. The next step in the article writing process was for the professional communicator to consult existing documents and/or subject matter experts (SME) to gather facts. Rarely would the professional communicators meet face-to-face with an SME. Instead, most consultations occurred over e-mail. After the article author writes a substantive first draft, she would then upload the document to the company shared drive and alert her peers, via instant messenger, e-mail or phone that article draft was ready for review.

For each issue, there is a folder located on the shared drive to house the article files. Within this folder are five subfolders that include: drafts, edited, images, layout, and final. The first draft is uploaded to the drafts folder and the author saves the file as the article title or a phrase that foreshadows the article content.
Each draft must also include a header which includes the following information: issue month, article status, picture inclusion, SME’s name, SME approval, name verification, and versions (Figure 4.1). Concerning the inclusion of pictures, the article author would indicate in the header whether or not the article would have an accompanying image and, if so, would include the filename of the picture that was uploaded to the image folder. In the earlier drafts, the header would include the names of all SME that were consulted during the drafting process and then indicate, typically in later drafts, the SMEs’ approval of the content. As Lauren commented in an interview, the worst mistake a writer could make is to spell an employee’s name wrong (Interview 4, 13 July 2009). Therefore, the group thought it would be pertinent to include name verification in their process and to reflect that confirmation in the header.

Figure 4.2 is a copy of the process flow document that outlines the document review process. What is important to note is that this document delineates the responsibilities of each group member. Per the process flow document, first and
second edits are completed and the header is updated accordingly. For example, if Lauren wrote an article Delilah and Katie are expected to review the document and insert their initials in the header to document their participation. In addition to inserting her initials in the header, each time a professional communicator reviews a document she also changes the filename to denote the article version to organize how the files appear on the shared drive. After the Delivery News writers have collaborated on the drafts, the article author then informs Amy, the copyeditor, that the document is ready for her review. Amy then makes any necessary edits and/or contributes comments to the drafts. After doing so, she then inserts her initials at the end of the filename and saves the document in the edited folder.
Process Flow for Delivery News & Unity:

1. Original article is written and saved in the ‘DRAFTS’ folder by author & will include header info (as shown above).

2. First and second edit reviews are completed and header info is updated accordingly.

3. Amy is then notified by the author that edited article is ready for her review and approval in the ‘DRAFTS’ folder; Amy reviews and makes any necessary edits.

4. When Amy’s edit review has been completed, the article is saved with Amy’s initials “ASG” and moved to the ‘EDITED’ folder.
   > (NOTE: Amy may take any articles she sees fit for Unity. She will add “UTY” to the title, after Amy’s initials so the layout person is aware that it has been copied for publication in Unity. Amy will copy the article to the Unity folder for publishing in Unity).

5. Beverly will do final review of all articles in the “EDITED” folder. Beverly will save as ‘FINAL’, along with “EA” as ‘Edits Accepted’ to indicate it is ready for layout, and keep in the EDITED folder – AND – she will number for publishing priority. (This task may also be assigned to the communications reps.)

6. The layout artist will complete the required functions for layout and save in the ‘LAYOUT’ folder.

7. The final newsletter will be saved in the ‘FINAL’ folder.

Figure 4.2: Process Flow Document
After all article drafts have been reviewed and moved to the edited folder, then Beverly or Linda would review the document. If they felt the document was ready for publication, they would then insert the “EA” at the end of the filename to indicate that edits were accepted. In the event that Beverly did not approve an article and felt that further revisions were needed, she would sometimes add “with queries” to the end of the filename. Editing the filename made it easier for the article author to find the draft Beverly provided comments and instructions to direct revisions.

Some of the article filenames in the edited folder were preceded by a number which indicated its publishing priority which could be assigned by anyone in the group. Prioritizing the articles was necessary because the task of creating the newsletter layout was delegated to a graphic designer who worked in the internal communications department within the publications and video group. The graphic designer would use Microsoft Publisher to create the newsletter and each version of the layout was saved in the layout folder to denote this process as well. Once the group came to a consensus about the readiness of the newsletter, which was usually a result of time constraints, their most frequent process for editing the final draft was for Delilah, Lauren, and Katie to each print out a copy of the document and individually edit the document. Then, they would participate in a conference call and assign one person to take notes about additional changes on one document as they each went through and explained what edits needed to be made. After these changes had been made, then Beverly or Linda would review the newsletter for final approval and save the file in the final folder. The
finalized *Delivery News* newsletter is then sent to all employees who work in the energy delivery and customer service business unit via the company e-mail and also uploaded to the company’s intranet so that can be accessed by all energy delivery and customer service employees.

Figure 4.3 identifies the various stages an article typically undergoes to be included in the final *Delivery News* newsletter just described. Within this description was evidence of the multiple technological tools this group of professional communicators utilize to mediate collaboration throughout the various stages of textual production. Such tools include the telephone, asynchronous and synchronous modes of communication, such as e-mail or the company instant messaging system. Moreover, the company shared drive and the track changes and comment feature in Microsoft Word were the two most frequently used technological tools. This part of the process is indicated in Figure 4.3 by the yellow boxes marked as second, third, fourth, and fifth drafts. Embedded in a technological context, it is during this phase of document review that the majority of article revisions occur.

![Figure 4.3: Article Writing Process](image-url)
As explained in the process flow document, each time a professional communicator reviews a draft, she inserts her initials into the header and saves the filename to reflect the document version. In some instances, a professional communicator reviews a document and does not make any changes or provide comments on the draft. However, she still changes the draft version number and filename to indicate to her peers that she has reviewed the document. In other instances, the review process might include a professional communicator making a few insertions that pertain to grammar or punctuation or making formatting changes such as deleting extra spacing or enlarging the font. Regardless of how significant or insignificant the changes or contributions made to the text are, each time a professional communicator reviews the document and changes the header and filename that process results in a different document version. As such, what constitutes an article draft was determined by the professional communicators.

It is during this review process that the professional communicators will provide comments to one another to either direct future changes to the text or to account for changes that have been made to the text. An affordance of having obtained digital copies of all article drafts was the ability to identify these comments and analyze the ways in which they did or did not influence revisions.
4.2 Comment Corpus Analysis

This section documents how grounded theory was used to analyze the comment corpus and present the significant findings of this dissertation. First, I describe how open coding was conducted and what it yielded. Then I explain the transition from open coding to the development of a coding scheme. The primary purpose of the coding scheme was to systematically account for the ostensible functions of each comment. As such, multiple iterations of the coding scheme were developed and applied to the corpus to ensure methodological validity. As a result, the final coding scheme provided a way to uniformly identify the following comment functions: suggestion, directive, query, justification, acknowledgment and camaraderie. Axial and selective coding procedures resulted in the ability to identify comment effects (to be discussed more thoroughly later in the chapter) which include cooperation, conflict and negotiation. Taken together, these emergent categories were organized into a collaboration heuristic used to identify the features of communicative responsibility.

It is important to reiterate the progression of abstraction that occurs throughout data analysis. As Miles & Huberman (1994) explain “Looking at a situation, any researcher wants to know clearly what is going on and how things are proceeding- and usually wants as well to understand and explain why things occur as they do” (emphasis in original, p. 90). Therefore, the progression from what to how to why necessitates conceptualizing the data in increasingly more abstract ways in order to account for and make sense of the inherently complex social process of collaboration.
Open coding. The comment corpus was built by reading all 1395 article drafts and identifying comment balloons inserted throughout. This process was completed by reading each article draft in chronological order and handwriting each comment to compile the corpus (Figure 4.4). The publication date of each article was written in the upper right-hand corner. Also noted were the article author, article title, and total word count for the finalized article. Each professional communicator was assigned a different color to more easily discern who contributed which comment. Brackets, located in the left margin, were used to denote comments that appeared in the same comment balloon. After compiling the comment corpus and checking the article drafts three times to ensure that all comments were identified, the total number of comments were also written in the left margin for future reference.
Katie: KD - He's a student

Lauren: Are they old enough to drive?

Amy: Is this Springfield? Need to specify location.

Katie: KD - Done

Amy: On student?

Katie: KD - PSI student - unified with Lynne Data in HR

Amy: Why specify that they're young?

Katie: KD - Actually, the fire chief had specified 'those young Canadians' in his letter - and when I saw the photo, I just kept it in - but way is fine with me - it's obvious they're young.
An advantage of handwriting all the comments was the opportunity to familiarize myself with the data. However, in attempt to make data analysis more manageable, I created an Excel spreadsheet to organize the corpus data. Specifically, the spreadsheet listed each comment, comment author, article author, article title and publication date. Organizing the data in this way afforded the option of manipulating the data without compromising the integrity of the corpus. For instance, Table 4.1 illustrates the number of comments each professional communicator contributed throughout the comment corpus. Creating pivot tables in Excel made quick work of this task. Another benefit of creating the spreadsheet was the ability to print duplicate Excel sheets to make coding notes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Communicator</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>677</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The primary objective of coding and analyzing the comment corpus was to more fully understand how the professional communicators’ collaborative response practices were embedded in the review process and, thus, provide a thick description of how distributed collaboration occurs in this particular workplace setting. With this aim in
mind, the first step in data analysis was open coding which is the process of examining, dissecting, conceptualizing and categorizing the raw data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61). The physical process of open coding included reading and re-reading the Excel spreadsheets in which all 677 comments were organized. It was a purposeful decision to analyze each comment as a discrete unit of analysis to avoid any distractions and/or other potential influential features included in the article drafts. Said differently, the objective of open coding was to closely examine the raw data, i.e. comments, and experiment with various ways in which the comments themselves could be conceptualized. Analyzing the comments in isolation was necessary to ensure that all findings could be traced back to specific datum and ensure that all findings were inductively derived from the data.

Because open coding can be an unwieldy process, Strauss & Corbin (1990) advocate the use of various techniques as a way to more fully interrogate the data (p. 76). One such technique that was utilized was the use of questioning technique proved to a generative strategy during open coding. The use of questioning is a simple technique that entails asking basic journalistic questions such as who, what, when, where why and how (p. 77). This approach proved to be effective because it provided just enough structure to the open coding process without imposing any theoretical constructs upon the data due to the ambiguity of the questions. A second technique employed during open coding was to compare and contrast the comments as a way to
elucidate collaborative response practice that all group members engage in as well as individualized patterns of each professional communicator.

Comment Referent. After reading the comment corpus multiple times and documenting some of the salient features of the comments, I began the process of creating codes and categories to make sense of the data. The process started by identifying the topic(s) of each comment and creating tentative codes that were indicative of the comment referent(s). The purpose of discerning comment referent was to systematically account for the ways in which the professional communicators talked about writing and the specific concerns they addressed during the review process. The process of ascertaining comment referent via the coding scheme could be construed as a basic exercise in content analysis. However, I argue that discerning comment referent in the early stages of data analysis is one way to contextualize how the professional communicators’ collaborative response practices are embedded in the review process and suggests ways in which distributed collaboration is operationalized. Moreover, systematically identifying the content of comments enables a thicker description of the ways in which comments can influence, direct and/or motivate textual changes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content: add(ed)</td>
<td>Comments in a reviewer suggests additional content is needed are coded as content: add</td>
<td>LAK: Is this the definition of incompatible vegetation- if so I think the parenthesis should be added (vegetation that can...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments in which an author acknowledges that she integrated additional content into the document are coded as content: added</td>
<td>DB: Added &quot;titles&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content: delete(d)</td>
<td>Comments in which a reviewer suggests that content should be deleted are coded as content: delete</td>
<td>LAM: I agree with April. This is not appropriate to put in the article. Despite what the SME wants, this needs to be pulled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments in which an author acknowledges that she omitted text are coded as content: deleted</td>
<td>KAJ- Eliminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content: inclusion</td>
<td>Comments in which an author provides an explanation for reverting text back to its original form or making small revisions to text that was deleted by a reviewer in a previous document or comments in which the author provides an explanation for not deleting text in response to a reviewer’s suggestion to do so.</td>
<td>KAJ: It is extremely important that we remain in their favor. Also, highlighting the relationship was a specific request.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Comments that ask the author to provide evidence to support a claim being made by consulting and/or obtaining a quote from a subject matter expert and/or a data source (such as press release, portal, surveys, etc.)</td>
<td>ASG: Make sure we have confirmation to back up this claim in case someone asks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Comments in which a reviewer is checking the validity of a statement and/or ensuring that facts contained within the document are correct</td>
<td>BD: Section is slightly confusing. Does MUOC sponsor/the first round of competition then TransOptions sponsors the northeast finals? Rewrite for clarification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Comments that explicitly reference how an article should be formatted to conform to the Delivery News genre. Such comments can pertain to bolding employee names, including employees’ titles and business units.</td>
<td>ASG: Remember to cap C in reference to our Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codes</td>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Comments that refer to the use and integration of images such as pictures, graphs, tables, etc.</td>
<td>LAK: Nice photos. Where did you get them from? Can we use them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Comments that suggest rearranging the text to improve the overall organization of the piece</td>
<td>LAM: We mention Customer Service at the end but not at the beginning of the article. Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diction</td>
<td>Comments that refer to specific language employed in the construction of an article</td>
<td>ASG: Let's replace this with &quot;diligently&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Comments that suggest how to revise sentence structure</td>
<td>ASG: Or should this be: &quot;... a panoramic view of the area in back of the trailer.&quot; Why would they need a panoramic view of the trailer's back?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>Comments that refer to correct punctuation usage</td>
<td>DB: I am unclear about this since I have never heard of him refer to an &quot;instinct&quot; before. Should it say a safety instinct? Or is it the instinct to never let your guard down? Then the second M dash goes in place of the word AND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Comments that refer to correct grammar</td>
<td>LAK- Plural backing alarm and camera</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of applying the comment referent coding scheme to the corpus was to identify the various writing concerns addressed throughout the review process (Table 4.3). The most frequently occurring comment referent code were fact codes which accounted for 19% of the comments. Syntax codes, the second most frequent comment referent code documented, totaled 122 instances or 17% of the total content codes. Occurring 112 times, diction codes were the third most identified comment referent code.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.3: Comment Referent Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content: delete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content: add</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content: deleted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content: added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content: inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding results suggest that the majority of comments, 62%, pertain to issues of readability, accuracy and genre. These preliminary findings align with existing scholarship that explores the document review processes that professional writers
engage in. In a study investigating the document review process of professional writers, van der Geest & van Gemert (1997) reported that survey respondents identify appropriateness, accuracy and completeness and correctness and consistency as the three main topics for reviewing documents (p. 437). Couture & Rymer (1993) differentiate the composing processes of professional writers to those of professionals who write by explaining how professional writers are attuned to document readability. Specifically, they argue that “When given a choice of two alternate versions of a sentence, career writers tend to prefer the version written according to readability guidelines far more consistently than other professionals” (p. 18).

Commenting Strategies. The process of coding for comment referents entailed working closely with the data. In doing so, I observed use of different linguistic strategies used to construct the comments. Akin to the rationale for coding comment referents, the purpose of identifying specific commenting strategies employed throughout the review process was the ability to explore the specific ways in which the professional communicators wrote about writing. Moreover, as a material artifact, the comment corpus afforded the unique opportunity to archive, compare and contrast the exact language used by the professional communicators. Analyzing the various commenting strategies not only illustrates how comments are crafted but also provides evidence of the professional communicators’ collaborative response practiced are embedded in a larger social context. More specifically, it can be argued that the professional communicators employ specific politeness strategies when constructing
comments as a way to maintain and develop a positive social dynamic. Frequently used politeness strategies include the strategic use of personal pronouns, hedging and providing syntactical examples.

The most frequent commenting strategy utilized by the professional communicators was the strategic use of personal pronouns. For example, when reviewers would suggest how the text could be improved they would begin the comment with “I” instead of using “you.” Using “I” is a commenting strategy intended to save face. This strategy is far less combative then if the reviewer were to refer to the author as “you” or by name.

Another way that the reviewers would avoid using “you” when writing to the article author would be to say “we” instead. The use of “we” refers not only to the group but also how Midwest Utility’s corporate identity as it is manifested through written communication. For example, Couture (1992) references Cheney’s “three functions of the use of we in business writing: (a) to assert ‘common ground,’ (b) to identify a common component, or (c) to link individuals to a corporate interest” (emphasis in original, p. 22). Moreover, because “the review process is designed to create an institutional product” and therefore “deals not only with content but also with organizational values” it seems appropriate that the professional communicators use the pronoun “we” during collaboration to reference themselves as well as Midwest Utility because of their responsibility to create communications on behalf of the organization (Kleimann, 1993, p. 67).
Framing comments by explaining what “I” or “we” should do is an effective way to ensure that the focus of the comment is about the text and not the author. For instance, Lauren commented to Katie that “I would consider making a sentence or two from one of paragraphs a quote.” If instead she had wrote “You should consider making a sentence or two from one of these paragraphs a quote” there would be a noticeable change in tone in which Katie might interpret Lauren’s comment more as an instruction rather than a suggestion.

In addition to using the pronoun “I”, another commenting strategy utilized in the example above is the use of hedging. Quite frequently the reviewers would use “I” or “we” and hedge their comments to be polite and non-threatening. Much like strategic pronoun use, the reason the professional communicators would hedge comments was to imply that the author maintains authorship and control over the document during the review process. For example, Katie commented to Delilah “Just a thought: normally you are not suppose to move a victim's head. Do we want to include this detail? Although it shows a caring act, we may inadvertently be telling people that this is ok to do at accident scenes. Maybe run past Pam T?” Katie hedges three times in this comment. She begins by hedging the entire comment by stating “just a thought.” She hedges a second time in the introductory clause of the sentence by writing “Although it shows a caring act.” The third hedge appears in the last phrase of the comment which reads “Maybe run past Pam T?”
A third commenting strategy the professional communicators was to offer specific language. Specifically, when reviewers would suggest syntactical revisions they would not only indicate why changes should be made but provide an example of how the issue could be resolved. For example, Lauren commented to Delilah that “This seems awkward maybe ‘and evaluate smart charging technologies and understand the consequences of utilizing the technology’.” Lauren begins her comment with the explicit rationale “This seems awkward” to justify her suggestions for why the phrase should be revised. She continues by offering that the phrase “and how smart charging technologies can become part of the solution” to “and evaluate smart charging technologies and understand the consequences of utilizing the technology.”

Table 4.4 illustrates additional examples of the ways in which the professional communicators utilized commenting strategies to maintain a positive social dynamic within the group.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reviewer</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>“Should we say intern or student? Above it says intern. Maybe we say 1st year. That is how Emily Koehn refers to them. But I'm not sure of the correct term.”</td>
<td>Hedging</td>
<td>Should</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>But I'm not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>“Should we say intern or student? Above it says intern. Maybe we say 1st year. That is how Emily Koehn refers to them. But I'm not sure of the correct term.”</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>“My personal opinion, but I don't like this title- maybe something like ‘It Can Happen In a Flash.’”</td>
<td>Hedging</td>
<td>My personal opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>“Not sure if we should have this as it sounds like a negative. Maybe rewrite?”</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>“Not sure if we should have this as it sounds like a negative. Maybe rewrite?”</td>
<td>Hedging</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>“Was he actually honored? He just accepted on behalf of the company- this sounds like he won an award. I would change to... I'm glad he was on hand to accept this award for MU.”</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>“Was he actually honored? He just accepted on behalf of the company- this sounds like he won an award. I would change to... I'm glad he was on hand to accept this award for MU.”</td>
<td>Hedging</td>
<td>Would</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>“Was he actually honored? He just accepted on behalf of the company- this sounds like he won an award. I would change to... I'm glad he was on hand to accept this award for MU.”</td>
<td>Offering</td>
<td>“I'm glad he was on hand to accept this award for MU.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>“Suggest simplify quote ‘We offer customers hope. They often feel there is nothing or no one who can help them with their situation- when, in fact, there is help in many forms.’”</td>
<td>Offering</td>
<td>“We offer customers hope. They often feel there is nothing . . . with their situation- when, in fact, there is help in many forms.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>I added ‘work’ to give more meaning to ‘tasks.’ Could also be work related tasks. Something to tie it to our work - and not picking up the laundry on a Saturday... Or if the message is on and off the job - then say ‘Just like everything we do, requires our undivided attention’.”</td>
<td>Offering</td>
<td>“Just like everything we do, requires our undivided attention”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.4: Commenting Strategies**
Communicative Events. Coding the corpus to determine comment referents and commenting strategies provided a way to account for what issues were addressed in the comments and how certain some comments were framed. Cumulatively, it provided a strong foundation to better understand how the professional communicators utilize comments to mediate distributed collaboration. While coding for commenting strategies it became apparent that there was a relationship between comment referent and commenting strategy. Motivated to better understand the relationship between what was discussed and the way such language was framed, it was necessary to broaden the scope of analysis from studying isolated comments. More specifically, rather than just referencing the comment corpus spreadsheet while coding, it then became prudent to identify a comment, open all article drafts associated with the comment and then begin creating codes and categories that were reflective of how each comment functioned within the collaborative process.

This analytic shift in coding afforded the opportunity to better understand how the professional communicators used comments to engage in a dialogue about the text that was sustained across multiple drafts. Henceforth, comments that can best understood as a dialogue between two professional communicators are referred to as communicative events to preserve the relationship between comments that appear across multiple drafts. Communicative events also refer to changes that a professional communicator makes to the text in response to a comment. Although obvious, a point worth emphasizing is that the professional communicators use the track changes and
comment feature as one way to overcome the spatial constraints of working in different
locations. An affordance of using technological tools to mediate collaboration is the
ability to capture and archive specific instantiations of collaboration however; such
permanence is a consequence of the technology and was not a motivating factor as to
why it is used to mediate collaboration. Instead, Beverly explained that the primary
reason why the group utilizes the company shared drive and Microsoft Word features is
due to the fact that it enables dynamic interaction (Interview 5, 15 May 2009). To
further emphasize the need to understand how a series of texts are representative of a
process, it is beneficial to illustrate and explain the changes made to one article during
the document review process. Providing this example will make it easier to understand
how subsequent analysis was conducted.

Figure 4.5 is a screenshot of the article draft that Delilah uploaded to the shared
drive. The purpose of the article is to explain how Midwest Utility implemented a
process to increase productivity. As previously discussed, each article draft includes a
header that identifies: issue month, article status, available pictures, subject matter
expert(s), name of person who approved text (if needed) and document version. Given
the task at hand, the most informative header information is the document version
which is inserted by the professional communicator. This list provides a quick reference
of who reviewed the draft and in what order.
Cleaning up the Q – Knowing Where our Work Really Is
In the Feb. 7 edition of Delivery News, we described the Company’s new Capacity Planning efforts. Capacity Planning is all about applying the right resources to the right work at the right time.

In order to be successful at Capacity Planning, you need to know where the work really is. The second facet of the overall process to improve resource allocation is understanding exactly what work needs to be completed—and this means reducing the backlog of orders in our system by eliminating those which are either completed or no longer valid. Cleaning up the backlog, or “Q”, allows us to focus our resources on that work which is real and needs to be completed.

You might think that this should be a non-issue, but after a closer look, the team identified that the system was full of out-of-date orders.

The “Q” cleanup efforts started throughout the Midwest Utility system in late 2007. As of mid-February 2009, the number of orders in the Q have been reduced by 82 percent, or nearly 88,000 orders!

It took a lot of work and concentrated effort by a lot of people, but the results are more than worth it. According to Rebecca Kimball, general manager, Operations Services and a member of the team spearheading this effort, “by eliminating the orders in the system that are no longer valid, we’re able to get a better handle on where and when we need to allocate our resources.” Adds Russ Jones, director, Operations Services, “Timely and timely allocation of resources not only reduces our costs but also improves customer satisfaction.” And that’s what it’s all about.

Next month we will describe the prioritization process – the third step in this companywide process.
Katie was the first professional communicator to review the article (Figure 4.6). Because the track changes feature was enabled, all changes Katie made to the document appear in light blue font. In addition to making a few sentence level edits, Katie highlighted the letter “Q” in the article title and inserted the comment “Should this be written out as “Queue” with the “Q” in parenthesis for use in the body of the article?”

Lauren’s sentence edits can be identified as the changes made in orange (Figure 4.7). She highlighted the sentence “It took a lot of work and concentrated effort by many people, but the results are more than worth it” and inserted the comment “Shouldn’t this be a quote?”
Delilah returns to her article draft to address the feedback Katie and Lauren provided (Figure 4.8). In response to Katie’s comment that questioned the use of “Q” in the title, Delilah changed “Q” to “Queue.” One of the sentence level edits that Katie made was to change the word “concerted” to “concentrated.” However, Delilah expresses her disagreement with the change by commenting “I am changing this back bc concerted and concentrated don’t mean the same thing- this was a deliberative effort.” Delilah responds to Lauren’s question of whether or not a sentence would be more effective as a quote by explaining “I don’t thin kit [sic] has to be a quote, but it could be I suppose. It is more of a comment on the work.” In addition to addressing her reviewers’ comments, Delilah also inserts a new paragraph into the article.
Amy inserted two comments during her review of the draft. Specifically, Amy suggested that the article title be shortened “to make a shorter headline.” In her second comment, Amy offers her opinion on the use of “concerted” and recommends “How about eliminating ‘and concerted effort..’ and just state: ‘It took a lot of hard work by many people.’? The word effort is defined as ‘hard work’ so by eliminating it we won’t be redundant.”
Comment Function. This section explains the coding scheme that was developed to code for comment function. Specifically, the function category was comprised of six different codes: suggestion, directive, query, justification, acknowledgment and camaraderie. Cumulatively, these codes provided a way to account for the changes made to the text as well as understand how comments could direct, influence and/or motivate subsequent changes revisions. The rationale for coding comments for their discernable function was to account for the relationship between what comments referenced and how those comments were posed. Postulating why the professional communicators commented provides insight about the professional communicators’...
perceptions of what is good writing. Additionally, discerning what, if any, influence comments had on textual changes contributes to a more adequate representation of the specific ways in which their collaborative response practices are situated in the larger activity of distributed collaboration.

**Suggestion.** Suggestion codes were defined as instances in which a reviewer offers an opinion, fact, and/or specific language to be considered by the article author for further revisions. Figure 4.10 is an example in which Amy suggests to Katie to revise a sentence in an article that applauds the efforts of a Midwest Utility Operating Companies employee’s efforts to help a distressed motorist. Katie wrote “Rescue efforts for the occupant were then initiated by EMS and the driver was safely removed from the vehicle.” Amy suggested that the sentence be revised to “EMS was able to safely remove the driver from the vehicle once the area had been cleared of the downed power lines” to emphasize that the necessary safety precautions were taken, removal of the downed power lines, to ensure the safety of all those involved in the rescue efforts.

![Figure 4.10: Example of Suggestion Code](image)
Directive. Directive codes were defined as comments in which the reviewer tells the writer that revisions must be made to the text. In opposition to suggestions, directive codes functioned as commands and, therefore, directed the article author to make specific revisions. For example, Figure 4.11 illustrates a comment in which Amy is directing Katie to make a sentence level edit. The force of the utterance is indicated by Amy’s use of “need” which indicates that the comment should be perceived as explicit instruction.

![Comment [ASG8]: Need to say "... interning for MUOC to sporting Yankee pinstripes..." so people won't interpret as interning for the Yankees.](image)

Figure 4.11: Example of Directive Code

Query. Also included in the comment corpus are instances in which the reviewer would ask a question or series of question to clarify and/or solicit additional information pertaining to the article draft. Because the ostensible function of such comments was to pose a question(s), these comments were identified as query codes. In the first article draft, Delilah started the article by writing “The world’s foremost technical society in the fields of heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration, the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) advances technology to serve humanity and promote a sustainable world.” Katie was the second to review the article and changed this first sentence to read “The American
Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning (ASHRAE) – the world’s foremost technical society in the fields.” Lori was the second professional communicator to review the draft and asked Delilah if she “Should clarify in what field? HVAC?” to clarify the revised sentence due to the fact that Katie deleted the portion of the sentence that clarified what vocational fields the society pertained to (Figure 4.12).

![Comment [LAK4]: Should you clarify in what field? HVAC?](image)

Figure 4.12: Example of Query Code

*Justification.* In general, justification codes were defined as instances in which the function of the comment was to provide an explanation or rationale as to why changes were made to the document. More specifically, four different scenarios were identified and are as follows: (1) a reviewer provides an explanation as to why she made revisions to the text, (2) the article author explains why she made a revision to the draft, (3) the article author provides a rationale about the current state of the document, and (4) the article author informs the reviewers that additional text has been added to the draft.
Given the previous example in which Lauren questioned whether it was necessary to specify a field, Delilah responded by justifying her decision not to revise the sentence. Figure 4.13 illustrates how Delilah responded in the same comment balloon as Lauren’s original query by explaining that the field is referenced in the previous sentence and, therefore, it would be redundant to specify.

Acknowledgment. Instances in which an article author recognized and revised text in response to a reviewer’s comment were defined as acknowledgment codes. For instance, Amy suggested that Delilah “give a brief definition of a grid for new employees” in an article that informed Delivery News readers that one of operating companies was chosen as a test site to pilot the integration of smart grid. Figure 4.14 illustrates that Delilah responded to Amy’s suggestion within the same comment balloon by informing her that she added a definition for the grid. The newly integrated language is also indicated by orange text in the figure below.
Camaraderie. Camaraderie codes were defined as comments in which the reviewer provides tangential and/or humorous commentary on an article as a way in which to maintain and develop a social dynamic within the group. For example, under the guise as a safety article, Lauren wrote a story about an employee who hit a wild turkey while driving and titled the article “Thank Goodness It Wasn’t a Frozen Turkey!” As shown in Figure 4.10, Amy suggested that Lauren change the title to “Thank Goodness It was Just a Turkey” because she rationalized that “there wouldn’t be a possibility of a frozen turkey on the road.” Lauren justified not revising the title by responding that it was “Not to be taken literally... Just a turkey doesn’t work because just a turkey could have killed them.” Beverly was the last professional communicator to review the draft and responded, within the same comment balloon, “Damn turkeys” as a way to interject satire into the document review process.

![Comment [ASG2]: What about: “Thank Goodness It Was Just a Turkey” as there wouldn’t be the possibility of a frozen turkey on the road. There is a possibility of larger animals. Just a suggestion!

LAK Not to be taken literally ...Just a turkey doesn't work because just a turkey could have killed them.

Beverly: Damn turkeys](image)

Figure 4.15: Example of Camaraderie Code

Six function codes were identified and include: suggestion, directive, query, justification, acknowledgment and camaraderie. These codes provided a way to
systematically account for the perceived function of each comment. In addition to the examples described above, Table 4.5 identifies, defines, and provides additional examples of each code.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.5: Function Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Codes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Query</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camaraderie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coding the corpus to ascertain the ostensible function of comments marked a shift in analysis from documenting the constituent comment features to understanding how comments can be understood as communicative events. The comment function codes provide a way to diagram the cause and effect relationship between comments and revisions. What follows are examples and diagrams of different communicative events that occur in the data.

In her first draft, Delilah wrote “Megan Driscol, former president, received this letter from a customer, complimenting the service she received from Shannon McDonald, advanced Distribution specialist in the Springfield district.” Amy commented “I think ‘former president’ sounds negative. How about this “A Midwest Utility customer Shannon McDonald, advanced Distribution specialist, Springfield district, on the service she provided.” In response, Delilah revised the text verbatim per Amy’s suggestion and read “A Midwest Utility customer complimented Shannon McDonald, advanced Distribution specialist, Springfield district, on the service she provided” (Figure 4.16).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 4.16: Communicative Event Offering Suggestion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer suggests that text be changed to A = Author uses suggestion verbatim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In her article Katie wrote “He then reminded the group to avoid three very important things: 1) Do not attempt to do something you do not know how to do; 2) Do not perform a task improperly because that is the way it was always done; and 3) Do not let distractions get in the way of working safely.” Beverly commented “strange way to say that these are things to avoid. It’s important to avoid three common behaviors. ‘Avoid three important things’ – so, are those things important or not? Rewrite this for clarity.” Regardless of Beverly’s directive to revise the paragraph, Katie did not make any changes to the text. Figure 4.17 provides a diagram of this communicative event.

### Figure 4.17: Communicative Event Resulting in No Changes

| Reviewer directs that changes A and B need to be made | Directive ignored and no changes were made |

After deleting the phrase “started the day off,” Amy justified the deletion by arguing “we say they provided opening remarks. Also, really don’t need to say to the PSI graduates as we’ve already established they they’re the audience” (See Figure 4.18).

### Figure 4.18: Communicative Event Involving Justification

| Reviewer changed A | Reviewer provided comment to justify change A |
Delilah questioned Lauren’s use of the word “features” in her comment that reads “Are there other features that were added? Or should this be singular?” to which Lauren responded “Plural backing alarm and camera.” A diagram of this communicative event is illustrated in Figure 4.19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 4.19: Communicative Event Involving Query and Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer questioned A → Article author responded and justified use of A = Communicative event results in no changes made</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comment Effects.** At this stage of analysis, the comment corpus has been coded to identify comment referent, commenting strategies and comment function. Taken together, these findings provide a pragmatic view of the professional communicators’ response practices. The fact that assertions can be made about the relationship between what was said, how it was said and a comment’s intended outcome proves that such findings are deeply rooted in the data. As such, to further abstract the data, I developed the category of collaborative effects to account for how conceptual activities are manifested in communicative events.

As previously explained, the category of collaborative effects is reappropriated from Bracewell’s & Witte’s (2003) work. They argue that theoretical constructs, such as intelligence, cannot be “‘known’ in and of themselves through the senses” because it is an abstraction (p. 522). However, the effects of such constructs can be observed. To help clarify this issue, the authors explain that the effects of intelligence can be
observed “when a pedestrian waits for vehicular traffic to clear before entering a crosswalk” (p. 522).

As argued above, thus far, data analysis has yielded sufficient evidence of the specific ways in which the professional communicators’ collaborative response practices are embedded in their process for distributed collaboration. It can be argued that comment referents, commenting strategies and comment functions can be labeled as effects and, cumulatively, are indicative of conceptual activities such as cooperation, conflict and negotiation. In the following section, I argue that communicative events can best be understood in terms of their collaborative effects. Making this conceptual leap will result in a more robust description of how the professional communicators are able to engage in dynamic and complex activities required for successful distributed collaboration.

Cooperation. All communicative events found in the corpus are indicative of the social context in which they are embedded. Mabrito (1992) refers to this phenomenon as sense of community that “allows us to view computer mediated collaborative writing as more than just an efficient vehicle for sharing and responding to texts, but rather, as in face-to-face encounters, an environment where writing becomes a ‘social act’” (p. 319). Understanding how the professional communicators’ collaborative response practices are situated in social context suggests reasons why the professional communicators engage in different collaborative response practices. In attempt to
answer *why*, in the following section I discuss how cooperation is defined, manifested in the corpus and why cooperation is an important feature of distributed collaboration.

Cooperation is defined as communicative events in which a reviewer provided a suggestion to the author and, in response, the author used this feedback to enhance the text. The ability to reach agreement devoid of face-to-face communication can be attributed to multiple factors which include comment referent and commenting strategies codes previously described. In addition to these codes, during the coding process, I discovered that the professional communicators utilized a commenting strategy that was overlooked in prior analysis. Specifically, a feature of cooperation is the reviewers’ ability to successfully argue why changes should be made by including an explicit rationale for their suggestions within the comment. Coding for rationale, as a commenting strategy, was a simple bipolar process in which I tallied how many comments included an *explicit* or *implicit* rationale. To more fully appreciate how cooperation functions as a collaborative effect, the following communicative events provide evidence of and explain how cooperation is manifested in the comment corpus.

In an article about driving safely, Lauren wrote “The seventies weren’t much different except you traded in your 8-track player for the much cooler cassette player, your parents were still begging you to get your hair cut and out of your eyes so you could see the road as they reminded you to slow down to 55 miles per hour to conserve gas.” Amy commented on the accuracy of this claim by offering “You may want to revise this – 8-tracks were popular during the 1970s – cassette tapes were popular
during the 1980s. I checked Wikipedia – along with personal memories!!!” Lauren addressed the inaccuracy be revising the sentence to read “The 1970s weren’t much different except your parents reminded you to slow down to 55 miles per hour to conserve gas and by the end of the decade you were ready to trade in your 8-track player for the much cooler cassette player.”

At the meta-level, Amy’s comment refers to factual problem that needs to be changed. The implicit rationale for Amy’s suggestion is that it is unacceptable for a newsletter article to include inaccurate information. She even fact-checked information on Wikipedia to support her claim. However, it is interesting to note that Amy hedges her suggestion by writing “You may want to revise this” in which the use of “may” implies that Lauren has a choice when it is not an option to publish the article with incorrect information.

After an employee was fatally injured on the job, Midwest Utility employees donated money to assist his four children. Delilah wrote an article about the employees’ generosity. She closed the story by writing:

We implore everyone to reassess your own commitment to working safely. We all know that conducting a thorough job briefing before and during the performance of our jobs is critical. If new situations arise, or conditions change, stop, and discuss the job again. We need to understand the hazards presented on every job and take every precaution to avoid injury. We also know that wearing every piece of
personal protective equipment is often the difference between severe injury and not. We need everyone to do this for your own safety and also out of love and respect for your families.

Lauren highlighted the entire paragraph and commented “This is good but I don’t think I would put it with Vaughan article. I am trying to get info on safety procedure for clearance controls (denergizing circuits) we can put this at the end of the safety corner.” Amy seconded this opinion by commenting “I agree – let’s take this out and leave this as an article for the family.” Consequently, Delilah agreed and deleted the entire paragraph.

Both Lauren and Amy framed their suggestions by using the personal pronoun “I” to express their opinions. Lauren justifies her suggestion to delete content with the explicit rationale that the paragraph could be incorporated into a future article. Taking a different approach but still providing an explicit rationale for deleting the paragraph, Amy argued that the paragraph should be deleted as to not offend the deceased employee’s family.

Lauren wrote a safety feature about the ways that Midwest Utility was attempting to improve employees’ driving habits while in company utility trucks. Reporting on the findings from a Job Safety Analysis (JSA), she wrote “The JSA lists job hazards and on-the-job do’s and don’ts along with outlining passenger responsibilities, such as notifying the driver of hazards (weather, construction, other drivers, etc.); ensuring the cab is free of distractions (newspapers, cell phone conversations, texting,
etc); handling all Company-related communications (GPS, cell phone, radio); and assisting with driving, changing lanes, turns, etc.” Katie found the phrase “assisting with driving” awkward. Specifically, Katie commented “This kind of sounds like they’ll be helping with the steering – maybe say ‘providing a second set of eyes to assist with . . . ’” Lauren revised the phrase to “providing a second set of eyes to assist with” which was Katie’s suggestion verbatim.

Katie begins her comment by providing an explicit rationale that “This kind of sounds like they’ll be helping with the steering” to support her suggestion that the language is problematic. She then hedges an offer to revise the syntactical issue.

Delilah wrote an article to acknowledge the philanthropic deeds of an employee who chaired an event to celebrate Black History month. To introduce the story, she began the piece with the sentence “Black History Month is a celebration and remembrance of significant events and individuals in African-American history and takes place in February in the United States each year.” However, Lauren did not think that this sentence the most effective way to begin the article. Specifically, she commented “Do we have to state this. I think it common knowledge? . . . if you want to mention maybe don’t lead with it. Place it after second paragraph.” Per Lauren’s suggestion, Delilah moved the sentence so that it followed the first paragraph. After doing so, Amy offered a comment echoing Lauren’s sentiment in which she commented “Do we really need this? I think most people already know about Black History month.” Delilah conceded and deleted the entire sentence from the article.
Lauren’s comment begins with a blunt query questioning if it is necessary to explain Black History month to the Delivery News audience. Her explicit rationale for deleting the content is based on her assertion that the purpose of Black History month is common knowledge. However, in the next sentence Lauren comments that if Lauren is unwilling to delete the sentence then “maybe don’t lead with it.” This is an interesting strategy to suggest that the sentence be deleted and then, if the article author is not in agreement, hedge on conditions for including the sentence. Delilah had already moved the sentence, per Lauren’s condition, before Amy chimed in and questioned if it was necessary to include the line. Another point worth noting is that Amy used the same explicit rationale for omitting the sentence as Lauren when hedging her argument that “I think most people already know about Black History month.”

In a brief two paragraph article, Katie wrote about the Midwest Utility Foundation donating money to a local organization. The second paragraph was drafted as follows:

The check, based on Mr. Hillman’s recommendation, is an example of the mission of the Midwest Utility Foundation, which awards grants to organizations in this service area that support their priorities; improve the vitality of our communities and support key initiatives; promote local and regional economic development and revitalization efforts; advance an educated workforce by supporting professional development; literacy and science, technology, engineering and mathematics education
initiatives; and support Midwest Utility employees' community leadership and volunteer interests.

Delilah highlighted the entire paragraph and inserted the comment “I would take this whole paragraph out – it reads like it is to an audience that doesn’t know who/what our foundation is. This paragraph is also repeated in the grant winners’ article . . . it’s overkill on the foundation mission.” Seemingly persuaded, Katie responded “That’s fine with me” and deleted the whole paragraph.

Delilah begins her suggestion to delete content by using the personal pronoun “I” to save face with Katie. In support of her suggestion, Delilah explicitly rationalizes that the paragraph should be omitted because “it reads like it is to an audience that doesn’t know who/what our foundation is” and “This paragraph is also repeated in the grant winners circle.” In an uncommon move, Katie responds to Delilah’s suggestion within the same comment balloon to acknowledge her decision to delete the paragraph.

The coding results of each of the above examples of cooperation are represented in Table 4.6. Presenting this information in table form makes it easier to compare and contrast the constituent features of cooperation as it functions as a collaborative effect. Specifically, the following patterns about how the professional communicators cooperate via their collaborative response practices emerged from the corpus:

- No evidence of how either editor cooperates
- The majority of comments suggest that content be deleted from the article
- Reviewers include an explicit rationale to support their opinions
- Reviewers hedge their suggestions to appear less confrontational
### Table 4.6: Examples of Cooperation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reviewer</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Comment Referent</th>
<th>Commenting Strategy</th>
<th>Comment Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>You may want to revise this – 8-tracks were popular during the 1970s – cassette tapes were popular during the 1980s. I checked Wikipedia – along with personal memories!!!</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Hedging Explicit</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>This is good but I don’t think I would put it with Vaughan article. I am trying to get info on safety procedure for clearance controls (denergizing circuits) we can put this at the end of the safety corner</td>
<td>Content: delete</td>
<td>Use of “I” Hedging Explicit</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>I agree – let’s take this out and leave this as an article for the family</td>
<td>Content: delete</td>
<td>Use of “I” Explicit</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>This kind of sounds like they’ll be helping with the steering – maybe say ‘providing a second set of eyes to assist with . . . ’</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Explicit Hedging Offer</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Do we have to state this. I think it common knowledge? ..if you want to mention maybe don’t lead with it. Place it after second paragraph.”</td>
<td>Content: delete Organization</td>
<td>Use of “I” Explicit Hedging</td>
<td>Query Suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Do we really need this? I think most people already know about Black History month</td>
<td>Content: delete</td>
<td>Use of “I” Hedging</td>
<td>Query Suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>I would take this whole paragraph out – it reads like it is to an audience that doesn’t know who/what our foundation is. This paragraph is also repeated in the grant winners’ article . . . it’s over kill on the foundation mission.</td>
<td>Content: delete</td>
<td>Use of “I” Explicit</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conflict. Another way in which the social context in which these comments were embedded was accounted for was through the development of the conflict category. Instances of conflict were a result of a difference of opinion between two professional communicators and/or an observable instance in which a professional communicator is not receptive to a comment. Although all comments that serve to direct future revisions function as an implicit difference in opinion, in defining the category of conflict I limited the scope to only address those comments in which a professional communicator explicitly states her objective. Moreover, instances of conflict were also marked by an author’s decision not to make any changes to the text in response to a reviewer’s comment and/or the negative response they provided to a reviewer.

Figure 4.20 provides an example of an exchange between Amy and Lauren in which they disagree about an article title. Specifically, Lauren wanted the article to read “Thank Goodness It Wasn’t a Frozen Turkey!” Amy suggested that she change the article title to “Thank Goodness It Was Just a Turkey” because she rationalized that “there wouldn’t be a possibility of a frozen turkey in the road.” Lauren responded to Amy’s comment by justifying that the title should “not be taken literally . . . Just a turkey doesn’t work because just a turkey could have killed them.” In the final newsletter, this article appeared as the lead story and included Lauren’s original title.
Amy frames her suggestion as a question to change the syntax of the headline given her explicit rationale that “there wouldn’t be a possibility of a frozen turkey on the road” but that “There is a possibility of larger animals.” However, Lauren is unmoved by Amy’s appeal and justifies that the headline should not be changed given that her intent was that it was “Not to be taken literally.” She rationalizes that “Just a turkey doesn’t work because just a turkey could have killed them.”

Katie was approached by managers to write an article to acknowledge the hard work of employees who were temporarily reassigned to a new project. In the article she wrote “These reassignments not only disrupted the employees’ business lives, but impacted many of their personal lives as well, with changes in assigned work shifts requiring many members to work a later shift.” Amy then commented that “Not sure if we should have this as it sounds like a negative. Maybe rewrite?” Katie countered that “CS&EE SME specifically requested this acknowledgement as this was an involuntary ‘assignment’.” In a rare appearance, Linda interjected that “I agree with April. This is
not appropriate to put in the article. Despite what the SME wants, this needs to be pulled” and then proceeded to delete the sentence (Figure 4.21).

Figure 4.21: SME Conflict

Amy makes two moves in her comment. First, she hedges an implicit suggestion to delete the sentence due to its negative tone. Posed as a question, she then suggests and implies that if Katie doesn’t delete the sentence then it should at least be revised. Katie justifies keeping the sentence with the explicit rationale that it specifically requested by the SME. Regardless of the request, Linda justifies her move to delete the sentence by rationalizing it is inappropriate.

Figure 4.22 provides a different example in which conflict arose between two professional communicators. Delilah wrote an article explaining how Midwest Utility would be implementing an emergency health program designed to help protect employees from the risk of a flu pandemic. The last line of the story instructed readers
to visit the “Pandemic Information page on the portal [Midwest Utility’s intranet] or contact your local Health Emergency Program site coordinator.” Lauren highlighted the phrase “Pandemic Information page on the portal” and questioned “How do we get there?” to which Delilah retorted “Lauren— as you know this was copied from the e-mail letter from HR. The link information was not included in the letter. But we can add it. We would have to ask HR or Linda for the path.”

**Comment [LAK2]:** Q. How do we get there?

Lauren— as you know this was copied from the e-mail letter from HR. The link information was not included in the letter. But we can add it. We would have to ask HR or Linda for the path.

Figure 4.22: Interpersonal Conflict

Lauren’s query about portal page’s location was posed based upon the implicit assumption that *Delivery News* readers, or “we,” would expect that such a pertinent fact would be included in the article. Although Delilah was receptive to the suggestion to include a hyperlink to the portal page, she justified that the information was omitted from the draft because it was not previously provided. More interestingly, as evidenced by the language she used to construct her comment, Delilah seemed to be annoyed by Lauren’s comment. Specifically, when she wrote “Lauren— as you know” seems to suggest that she believed it was unproductive to include the comment as it functioned
as a rhetorical question. Additionally, specifically referencing the reviewer by name seems to also suggest the force of the utterance in which she felt it necessary to address Lauren by name as if she was being scolded directly.

Lauren wrote a brief article about the company’s involvement in a community event. Katie was the first to pose a question about spelling. Specifically, she wrote “Lauren- What is the correct spelling? ‘Brier’ or ‘Briar’, as it appears later in the article” (Figure 4.23). Then Amy commented “I agree-- I’ve always seen ‘Briar’ and you have ‘Briar’ below.” Apparently aggravated by the exchanges, Beverly wrote “RATHER THAN CONJECTURE, LOOK IT UP. I JUST DID. IT’S BRIER. Beverly.”

The impetus and explicit rationale for Katie questioning the spelling of “Brier” was due to the fact that article included two different spellings. Amy implicitly argues that the correct spelling is “Briar” simply because that’s what she’s “always seen” and
this spelling appears further in the text. Beverly contributes to the dialogue by directing
the reviewers to stop wasting time and find the answer to the simple fact. Beverly’s
comment also functions as a justification as she corrected the spelling mistakes in the
article.

What was unique about Beverly’s comment in this exchange was her purposeful
choice to use all capital letters. Specifically, it’s important to note that her entire
comment is written in capital letters but she “signed” the comment using proper
punctuation. As such, her comment could be perceived as an instance of flaming. The
term flaming is used to describe conflicts that occur in computer mediated
communication. Turnage (2008) explains that messages that include flaming exhibit
“attributes such as hostility, aggression, intimidation, insults, offensiveness, unfriendly
tone, inhibited language, and sarcasm. In addition, other attributes, such as the use of
profanity, all capital letters, or numerous punctuation marks at the end of a sentence ... are sometimes characteristics of flaming” (p. 44). Using all capital letters to construct a
message can be perceived as offensive because such a typographic choice as the writer
yelling at her audience (Krohn, 2004, p. 324).

Table 4.7 summarizes the conflict coding results. Discernable patterns about the
ways in which conflict occurs include:

- Authors try to maintain ownership of the text
- Editors assert their control in situations of conflict
- Limited use of polite commenting strategies used in exchanges
- Instances of conflict do not have to involve article author
- There appears to be no relationship between comment referent and conflict
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative Relationship</th>
<th>Professional Communicator</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Comment Referent</th>
<th>Commenting Strategy</th>
<th>Comment Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reviewer</strong></td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>What about: &quot;Thank Goodness It Was Just a Turkey&quot; as there wouldn't be a possibility of a frozen turkey on the road. There is a possibility of larger animals. Just a suggestion.</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Offering</td>
<td>Query</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author</strong></td>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>LAK Not to taken literally... Just a turkey doesn't work because just a turkey could have killed them</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reviewer</strong></td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Not sure if we should have this as it sounds like a negative. Maybe rewrite?</td>
<td>Content: delete</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author</strong></td>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>CS&amp;EE SME specifically requested this acknowledgement as this was an involuntary 'assignment'</td>
<td>Content: inclusion</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reviewer</strong></td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>I agree with April. This is not appropriate to put in the article. Despite what the SME wants, this needs to be pulled</td>
<td>Content: delete</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reviewer</strong></td>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>How do we get there?</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Implicit Use of “we”</td>
<td>Query</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author</strong></td>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>Lauren - as you know this was copied from the e-mail letter from HR. The link information was not included in the letter. But we can add it. We would have to ask HR or Linda for the path.</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reviewer</strong></td>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Lauren - - What is the correct spelling? ‘Brier’ or ‘Briar’, as it appears later in the article</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Query</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reviewer</strong></td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>I agree-- I’ve always seen ‘Briar’ and you have ‘Briar’ below</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Implicit</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reviewer</strong></td>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>RATHER THAN CONJECTURE, LOOK IT UP. I JUST DID. IT’S BRIER. Beverly</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Directive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7: Coding Conflict
Negotiation. Identifying and analyzing instances of cooperation and conflict afforded the opportunity to more fully understand some of the strategies these professional communicators employ during collaboration. However, I found that developing these categories independently of one another proved problematic. More specifically, the data reflected instances in which exchanges that discussed a specific portion of the text contained evidence of both cooperation and conflict. Therefore, I had imposed an unnatural distinction by coding exchanges as either cooperation or conflict. To resolve this issue, I created the negotiation category as a way to understand the dialectical nature between cooperation and conflict.

Negotiation is defined as a communicative event in which two or more professional communicators confer about the text and textual revisions are made as a result of compromise. An affordance of the negotiation category was the ability to account for how the professional communicators worked through textual issues together via their collaborative response practices. It was necessary to develop a category that accounted for these exchanges based upon an understanding that collaboration requires that each individual involved in the process assumes responsibility for the final document. Said differently, I argue that instances in which a document reviewer makes changes and/or engages in overt negotiation via comments provides evidence of her accepting responsibility of the text by being actively involved in the revision process.
In an article reminding *Delivery News* readers to practice the fundamentals of safety, Delilah closed with the line “It is never too late to learn the fundamentals, especially when it comes to your safety.” However, Lauren disagreed with this statement and commented that “I would change this statement or just delete. There is a point when it is too late . . . when the accident happens. Maybe ‘Don’t wait to learn the fundamentals, it could be too late!’” (Figure 4.24). Katie chimed in with “I disagree . . . it’s never too late, there’s always a learning opportunity and we’re trying to be proactive here – before an accident occurs. I think it’s okay.” To add to the discussion, Delilah wrote “I’ll let Amy/Linda/Beverly weigh in on this statement. Peg Rex liked it. I think we are in a constant education mode when it comes to safety.” In the next article draft, Linda deleted the sentence.

![Comment](LAK6): I would change this statement or just delete. There is a point when it is too late . . . when the accident happens. Maybe “Don’t wait to learn the fundamentals, it could be too late!

*KJ* – I disagree . . . it’s never too late, there’s always a learning opportunity and we’re trying to be proactive here – before an accident occurs. I think it’s okay.

*DB*: I’ll let Amy/Linda/Beverly weigh in on this statement. Peg Rex liked it. I think we are in a constant education mode when it comes to safety.

Figure 4.24: Negotiating Safety Message
Lauren begins her comment by hedging her suggestion that Delilah either revise the sentence or omit it entirely. She provides the rationale that the sentence should be revised based on the fact that “There is a point when it is too late . . . when the accident happens.” She then concludes her comment by offering the line “Don’t wait to learn the fundamentals, it could be too late!” which emphasizes her argument. Katie interjects her opinion and suggests that the line should read as is based upon the rationale that “it’s never too late.” Delilah, the author, defers to the copy editor, Amy, and newsletter editors, Linda & Beverly, about how to proceed with the contentious line. She justifies her decision not to delete or revise the sentence two different ways. First, she implicitly argues that the sentence is fine as is because it was approved by the SME, Peg Rex. Conversely, if the SME found the sentence problematic it would have already been addressed. The second way in which Delilah justifies the sentence inclusion is based upon her assumption that the organization is “in a constant education mode when it comes to safety.”

Delilah wrote a series of articles explaining Midwest Utility’s capacity planning tool and processes which are used to apply the right resources to the right work at the right time. In the installment, she explains the ongoing process used to measure for improvement. To help explain the concept, she crafted the following quote “We have developed metrics that measure cost-per-connect for overhead and cost-per-connect for underground, at the district level” (Figure 4.25) Lauren was the first to suggest that
Delilah explain what cost-per-connect means. Specifically, Lauren highlighted the phrase “cost-per-connect” the second time it appeared in the sentence and commented “Do you think we should explain cost per connect? Perhaps a sentence after quote Cost-per-connect includes hardware and manhours blah blah.” Then Katie chimed in with her opinion that “I think we’re okay without the explanation.” Amy reviewed the draft third and also weighed in on the exchange. However, because she highlighted “cost-per-connect” the first time it appeared in the sentence, the spatial location of her comment suggests that she was the first to comment. Amy questioned “What does cost-per-connect mean? It’s mentioned quite a bit. Newer employees won’t know.” Siding with the majority, Delilah included the brief explanation that “Cost-per-connect takes the total cost of the category (for example residential overhead) and divides it by the number of new customer connects in that category. It includes labor, materials and reimbursements.”

Figure 4.25: Negotiating Scope
In the first sentence of her comment, Lauren employs an interesting combination of commenting strategies. More specifically, she addresses Delilah by using the personal pronoun “you” which could be interpreted as abrasive but then uses “we” which is indicative of a sense of community. After her initial query, Lauren then suggests that an explanation of cost-per-connect follow the quote in which the phrase first appears. Although vague, she does offer some language for Delilah to consider. Without providing an explicit rationale for her suggestion, Katie interjects her opinion there is no apparent need to add an explanation. Amy’s comment is quite similar to Lauren’s suggestion in that she begins by questioning “What does cost-per-connect mean?” She rationalizes that a definition should be added based upon the fact that “It’s mentioned quite a bit” and that “Newer employees won’t know.” Although Amy’s and Lauren’s comments include a similar intent, to add an explanation of cost-per-connect, their comments function in different ways. Lauren explicitly suggests that content be added to the article but Amy simply asks a factual question and infers that a description be added due to an audience consideration.

In response to a newly signed energy law, Katie explains how key elements of the law will impact Midwest Utility and its customers. In her first draft, Katie explained that “The plans include campaigns to educate customers about cost-effective ways to save energy, support for energy audits, and rebates and other incentives for efficiency upgrades.” Lauren revised the sentence to “The plans include campaigns to educate
customers about cost-effective ways to save energy and provide information and support on performing personal energy audits, rebates and other incentives for efficiency upgrades.” She then justified the revision by explaining “I tried to clarify Is this what you mean Self-audits? Not sure what the correct term is. Take a look at my rewrite.” Katie responded “– not necessarily ‘self’ audits – I have not seen the detailed plan, but this was taken from an approved press release, so I don’t want to imply specifics – I changed the verbiage a bit to remain generic.” Katie revised the sentence to read “The plans include campaigns to educate customers about cost-effective ways to save energy and provide information and support about energy audits, rebates and other incentives for efficiency upgrades” (Figure 4.26).

Comment [LAK2]: I tried to clarify Is this what you mean Self-audits? Not sure what the correct term is. Take a look at my rewrite of that sentence.

KJ – not necessarily ‘self’ audits – I have not seen the detailed plan, but this was taken from an approved press release, so I don’t want to imply specifics – I changed the verbiage a bit to remain generic.

Figure 4.26: Negotiating Syntax

Lauren’s comment functioned to justify why she made syntactical revisions to Katie’s article, which was a rare occurrence in the data. Specifically, in instances in
which the reviewer is not sure about what information the author is trying to convey or situations in which there is no right answer, the reviewer typically refrains from making in-text revisions. Instead, she will offer the suggestion in the comment balloon to avoid usurping the text. Even though Lauren does not provide an explicit rationale for her suggestion, the fact that she highlighted the phrase “about energy audits” implies that she was confused by the wording. Katie responds to Lauren by justifying why she changed a portion of the sentence from “support on performing personal energy audits” to “support about energy audits.” Specifically, Katie rationalizes that the language was “taken from an approved press release, so I don’t want to imply specifics.” Katie’s comment also functions as an acknowledgment because she revised the sentence in response to Lauren’s confusion.

Table 4.8 provides an overview of the negotiation coding results just discussed. Emergent patterns discerned about the effects of negotiation include:

- Editors do not participate in negotiation via their collaborative response practices
- Most frequently, negotiation addresses syntactical issues
- There is limited use of hedging comments during negotiation
- Authors justify their decisions by referencing corporate texts and/or SME’s
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative Relationship</th>
<th>Professional Communicator</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Comment Referent</th>
<th>Commenting Strategy</th>
<th>Comment Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer</td>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>I would change this statement or just delete. There is a point when it is too late.. when the accident happens. Maybe 'Don't wait to learn the fundamentals, it could be too late!'</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Content: delete</td>
<td>Use of “I” Hedge Offering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer</td>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>I disagree ... it’s never too late, there’s always a learning opportunity and we’re trying to be proactive here – before an accident occurs. I think it’s okay.”</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>I’ll let Amy/Linda/Beverly weigh in on this statement. Peg Rex liked it. I think we are in a constant education mode when it comes to safety.</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer</td>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Do you think we should explain cost per connect? Perhaps a sentence after quote Cost-per connects includes hardware and manhours blah blah</td>
<td>Content: add</td>
<td>Use of “we” Hedging Offering</td>
<td>Query Suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer</td>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>I think we’re okay without the explanation.</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Use of “we” Suggestion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer</td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>What does cost-per-connect mean? It’s mentioned quite a bit. Newer employees won’t know.</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Query</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer</td>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>I tried to clarify Is this what you mean Self-audits? Not sure what the correct term is. Take a look at my rewrite.</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Suggestion Query</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>not necessarily ‘self’ audits – I have not seen the detailed plan, but this was taken from an approved press release, so I don’t want to imply specifics – I changed the verbiage a bit to remain generic.</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Justification Acknowledgment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Collaborative Response Practices Heuristic

Coding the comment corpus resulted in the inductive development of a site specific Collaborative Response Practices Heuristic. This heuristic affords a systematic approach to analyzing how comments and communicative events facilitate the document review process as it occurs in a digital environment. The heuristic functions as a generative tool for interrogating comments’ salient features as well as the collaborative effects of communicative events. As such, the heuristic consists of four questions that operate at different levels of abstraction and include:

- What topic(s) is addressed in the comment?
- How is the comment constructed?
- Why is the comment provided?
- In the context of a communicative event, is there evidence of complex activity?

Applying the Collaborative Response Practices Heuristic to the comment corpus enabled me to design a taxonomy that classifies the different ways in which the professional communicators’ collaborative response practices motivate, influence and direct the textual production of a corporate document. As shown in Table 4.8, the Collaborative Response Practices Taxonomy is representative of the comment corpus coding results. However, both the heuristic and taxonomy could be used in a replicated study provided that they are applied to a similar data set.
4.4 Communicative Responsibility

While coding instantiations of negotiation, one of the ways in which the data was dimensionalized was by mapping the comment referent on a continuum from less to more frequent. In doing so, it became apparent that certain issues were non-negotiable. For instance, comment referents that were not identified in instances of negotiation include: format, image, punctuation and grammar. While it was not surprising to find that these issues were non-negotiable, what is noteworthy is that the reviewers would correct these problems within the article draft without consulting the author. Conversely, when the professional communicators would negotiate over syntax, diction and content, the reviewer would refrain from changing the article draft and, instead, address textual concerns via comments.
Identifying what topics are and are not negotiable lead to the discovery of flexible authorship. The notion of flexible authorship refers to the professional communicators’ practice of correcting non-negotiable issues, such as grammatical errors, within the article draft without conferring with the author. Doing so is an accepted practice that occurs throughout the data. In the comment corpus, only one instance of conflict was result of a reviewer making a change to the draft without consulting with the article author. As such, flexible authorship helps to explain how individual products are transformed into institutional products during the document review process (Kleimann, 1991, p. 520).

Discerning and understanding how flexible authorship is manifested in the data lead to the development of communicative responsibility as the core category. As previously mentioned, Aune et al. (2005) explain that “communicative responsibility is based upon the assumption that people approach a communicative event with the implicit belief that their primary goal is to establish a state of shared meaning or understanding between themselves and that each communicator bears a measure of responsibility for bringing about that state” (p. 359). I have reappropriated this term and define communicative responsibility as evidence of how the professional communicators assume and claim responsibility for all newsletter content during the document review process.
The fundamental precept that underpins their collaborative response practices is that the professional communicators function as a “communicative mechanism through which” Midwest Utility disseminates information (Couture & Rymer, 1993, p. 18). In order to do so, the professional communicators must operationalize an institutional mindset. Actualizing an institutional mindset requires the professional communicators to “accommodate their own views to the expectations of others for whom they speak” and, for some, “accommodation requires learning the conventions of a different discourse community, as well as adjusting their conceptual perspectives to those whose ideas they must represent, often at a distance, which increases the need for both extensive planning and revising” (Couture & Rymer, 1993, p. 18-9). Therefore, operationalizing an institutional mindset results in the professional communicators constructing texts with Midwest Utility’s best interests in mind that are devoid of their personal opinions and beliefs. How the professional communicators collaboratively construct Delivery News to meet this objective is due, in large part, to their sense of responsibility which motivates them to engage in various collaborative effects in attempt to create a quality newsletter.

A rhetorically based approach used by the professional communicators to build a consensus of what constitutes effective corporate communication is to conceptualize the Delivery News audience. The primary communicative function of the Delivery News newsletter is to inform employees of the corporation’s financial and operating
successes, strong focus on safety, position on regulatory and legislative activities, efforts
to improve transmission and distribution reliability and important achievements and
milestones. However, in order for the newsletter to meet these objectives, it is crucial
that each newsletter cater to the readers’ expectations. The ways in which the
professional communicators conceptualize and cater to audience, from an institutional
perspective, promotes communicative responsibility which operates at varying levels of
abstraction. These levels of abstraction include audience perception of corporate
communications, audience’s familiarity with newsletter conventions and newsletter
implications.

**Audience Perception.** As previously discussed, the majority of the professional
communicators’ comments pertain to low level writing concerns. Attention to detail is
crucial due to the fact that a simple error could have a negative impact on how
employees view Midwest Utility which explains why 52% of the comment corpus is
dedicated to questioning facts, syntax and diction. In attempt to create and maintain a
positive representation of the organization as it is manifested in *Delivery News* the
professional communicators’ sense of communicative responsibility motivates them to
question diction, syntax and the factual integrity of the articles.

Table 4.9 illustrates some excerpts from the comment corpus in which the
professional communicators question the use of a specific word. The ways in which the
professional communicators negotiate at the word level range from making sure that a
word is the most appropriate way to convey information to questioning a word’s connotation. Identifying instances in which the professional communicators negotiate over word choice is indicative of communicative responsibility due to their understanding that even if a word is technically used correctly it is still necessary to interrogate the connotation of words based upon how the audience may interpret the term. For example, Delilah inquires whether or not the word “agencies” is well suited to refer a utility company. Worried about the connotation of iterative and how it was used to refer to an improved process, Katie commented that “‘iterative’ means repetitions. I think this makes it sound more cumbersome than improved... I would suggest that we delete 'iterative‘.” Amy also expressed concern about how a word’s connotation could prove ineffective and, potentially, offensive to the audience when she suggested that “You may want to reconsider using the term biblical. Even though it’s not used in a religious context some employees still may take offense. You never know.”
Another way communicative responsibility is evident in the professional communicators' perception of audience are comments that question syntax. The comments listed in Table 4.10 provide examples of how syntactical issues of redundancy, repetition and tone are addressed. Questioning syntactical issues is a result of the professional communicators’ sense of communicative responsibility to ensure that newsletter content is clear and concise. Both Amy and Katie insert comments that explicitly argue why changes were made to the text to eliminate redundancy. Remembering that a similar headline was used in a recent newsletter,
Lauren suggests that the article title “Serving up Safety” be revised to avoid unnecessary repetition. Operating at a higher level of abstraction, Delilah questions the tone of sentences that “refer to past and not safe rules that OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] ‘used to have’” due to possibility that readers might interpret such statements as undermining the credibility of the federal agency. Moreover, critical statements have the potential to send a mixed message to the audience who are expected to adhere to the safety procedures set forth by OSHA by implying that the agency implemented procedures in the past that proved to be ineffective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Communicator</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Deleted “started the day off …” because we say they provided opening remarks. Also, really don’t need to say to the PSI graduates as we’ve already established that they’re the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>YWCA is &quot;Young Women’s Christian Association&quot; so the &quot;Women’s&quot; is redundant - And- Should this be spelled out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Can we change Serving up Safety- already used in issue not long ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>I don’t really like the way all these sentences refer to past and not safe rules that OSHA “used to have.” I think the focus needs to be on what they need to be doing today- I would shorten it up to one sentence that simply states that OSHA has learned and improved their requirements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The professional communicators’ comments also provide evidence of how they question the factual integrity of articles. As a primary communication vehicle, Delivery News is a consistent medium used to inform employees of important information. As such, readers expect that all content included in the publication will be factually accurate. The professional communicators’ comments that questioned factual integrity are motivated by communicative responsibility and ranged from queries about employees’ names to the clarification on a sequence of events. For example, as shown in Table 4.11, Amy directs Delilah to “Double check to make sure it’s Thomson and not Thompson” in effort to correctly spell the employee’s last name. As Lauren discussed in an interview, one of the worst mistakes they, as professional communicators, can make is to spell someone’s name wrong (Interview 4, 13 July 2009). Other details are questioned during the document review process such as Delilah’s query of whether or not a certain training program is mandatory. Another example is when Beverly questions “is the date correct?” to make sure that the newsletter is reporting timely information.
Table 4.11: Questioning Factual Integrity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Communicator</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>Is bucksqueeze a trademark? Look it up and insert the symbol on the first reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Double check to make sure it’s Thomson and not Thompson?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Did he run these marathons and have his first bout with pneumonia in fall of 2008? May want to specify when all of this happened leading up to his second round of pneumonia this year as stated in the next paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>Is it mandatory? I am not sure, but I would think it is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>So… this is the correct date? The training is done? If so, tweak the quote, please…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Familiarity of Newsletter Conventions.** In the February 28th edition of *Delivery News*, the regularly titled “Customer Kudos” feature appeared under the title “Customer Appreciation.” This error resulted in multiple readers e-mailing Beverly to question the change (Interview 1, 13 April 2009). Therefore, it can be argued that the *Delivery News* audience expects to find feature stories, such as “Safety Corner,” “Customer Kudos,” and “Community Events,” in each monthly edition. In response to readers’ expectations, the professional communicators’ sense of communicative responsibility motivates them to make attempts to maintain consistency from edition to edition by ensuring that each feature story conforms to a specific organizational pattern and scope.

For example, Katie commented “Who received this note? How was it submitted? We usually provide that info as an ‘opener’ to these notes” (Table 4.12).
Echoing a similar sentiment, Amy suggested to Katie that she should include the introduction “Here’s a letter Tim Gunn, area manager, received from a satisfied customer” to preface a customer’s note of appreciation. Delilah’s comment that “This could be deleted. It is a nice extra, but it reads like a bio, rather than a nice newsletter story. Just an opinion . . . We usually end stuff like this with a ‘We wish Brad the best of luck in his new role’ or something like that” is an example of article scope.

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<th>Table 4.12: Questioning Newsletter Conventions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Communicator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
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<td>Amy</td>
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**Newsletter Implications.** The most complex way in which the professional communicators attempt to create a shared meaning of an effective newsletter, via their collaborative response practices, is to question the potential implications of newsletter content. Anticipating how the *Delivery News* audience could interpret content is an integral feature of the document review process. As an institutional text, the
professional communicators are cognizant of the ways in which articles have the
target to influence readers’ behaviors. The following examples of communicative
events provide evidence of the specific ways in which the professional communicators
establish an understanding of how corporate texts function to influence behaviors
based upon their sense of communicative responsibility.

Katie wrote an article applauding the efforts of a Midwest Utility employee who
came to the aid of an injured motorist. Specifically, she wrote that John “placed a call
for help and attended to the driver, cushioning his head and keeping him still until EMS
crews arrived.” Highlighting the phrase “cushioning his head” Delilah inserted the
comment “Just a thought: normally you are not supposed to move a victim’s head. Do
we want to include this detail? Although it shows a caring act, we may inadvertently be
telling people that this is ok to do at accident scenes.”

The purpose of Katie’s article was to inform the *Delivery News* audience of the
Midwest Utility employees who graduated from a program designed to develop and
enhance community leadership by challenging and preparing individuals to assume
more active roles in their communities. In the article, Katie references a Midwest Utility
employee and his union affiliation. Highlighting this mention, commented “Isn’t this the
group that’s on strike? If so, I don’t think we’ll want to mention him. Need to double
check with Beverly.”
Lauren wrote an article about an employee who hit a turkey. One line of the article read “As she chatted Leif, keeping an eye on traffic in front of her, she suddenly noticed something out of the corner of her eye.” Amy highlighted the sentence and commented “May want to rewrite- seems like she’s too busy talking and wasn’t paying attention if her son had to keep an eye on traffic for her.”

In an article about exercising caution when backing-up a truck, Lauren wrote that “Our truck drivers rely on two mirrors located on each side of the tractor to help them back up and watch for traffic.” Delilah highlighted the phrase “rely on two mirrors” and commented “According to the APH [Accident prevention handbook], aren’t drivers suppose to ask a person to help them back up? You should run past Johanna.”

These four excerpts provide evidence of the ways in which the professional communicators are sensitive to the fact that newsletter content has the potential to influence behaviors. As such, it is imperative that the newsletter articles influence acceptable behaviors both on and off the job. Conversely, it is important that articles not report on any unacceptable behaviors so that the company will not be seen as condoning such actions.

As professional communicators, their primary function within Midwest Utility is to write on behalf of the organization. As such, what should be noted about these examples of communicative responsibility is that each of the professional communicators assumes responsibility in the textual production of newsletter articles.
It is this sense of responsibility that acts as a catalyst to question the implications of written communication to ensure that messages align with the organization’s beliefs.

4.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has documented and explained how distributed collaboration occurs in one workplace setting amongst six professional communicators. In order to contextualize the document review process in which the comment corpus is embedded, this chapter began with an overview of the typical collaborative process followed to construct the Delivery News newsletter and the technological tools utilized to mediate document production. What followed was a detailed description of the various coding procedures conducted which analyzed the data in increasingly more abstract ways. Such an analytical progression was necessary to account for the various ways in which the professional communicators’ collaborative response practices are embedded in a social context.

Ultimately, the purpose of this chapter is to argue how the core category of communicative responsibility provides a way to explain why the professional communicators actively engage in the document review process. Communicative responsibility, as an activity, explains how the professional communicators make meaning and come to an understanding via their collaborative response practices. This
meaning making process is necessary to ensure a positive material representation of corporate identity.
Investigating how six professional communicators collaboratively construct an internal newsletter for a large corporation has presented some unique opportunities that have been previously unexplored in the existing literature. More specifically, there is little to no existing research that explores the writing processes of professional communicators in a corporate setting. Additionally, this project accounts for the ongoing collaboration as it occurred for an entire year across multiple geographic locations. Taken together, these important contributions provide evidence of the ways in which professional communicators overcome spatial constraints by utilizing multiple technological tools to mediate collaboration in the construction of an important corporate document.

The key finding of this dissertation is the core category of communicative responsibility which is defined as evidence of how the professional communicators claim and assume responsibility for the published newsletter. What differentiates communicative responsibility from professional responsibilities, or duties in which the professional communicators are expected to accomplish by virtue of their job, is that the professional communicators are not required to engage in collaborative effects
during the document review process. Instead, they are motivated to cooperate, disagree and negotiate via their collaborative response practices based upon a felt need or responsibility to create effective corporate communication on behalf of Midwest Utility. Consequently, the construct of communicative responsibility explains why the professional communicators actively participate in the document review process.

Communicative responsibility is actualized, in part, due to the parameters that have been put in place and precede the document review process. As previously discussed, Delilah, Lauren and Katie are each responsible for writing articles as they pertain to a given geographical region as well as particular content. Each week the group participates in a weekly conference call to talk about article topics and get editorial approval on story ideas. In doing so, the professional communicators foreground the purpose of the newsletter to ensure consistency between publications and that, ultimately, each newsletter fulfills its mission. Once articles are ready for review, the group follows a codified review process that is clearly articulated in the job process flow document. This text explains how the review process is organized as well as establishes a hierarchy within the group. In summary, the group operates under the following parameters:

- Defined roles and responsibilities
- Shared sense of purpose for the Delivery News newsletter
- Continued adherence to the codified document review process
The job process flow document provides an overview of what each professional communicator’s role in the review process. However, what is not made explicit are the expectations or guidelines about how the review process should be operationalized. In order to come to a shared understanding about a text during the review process, the professional communicators adopted the practice of inserting comments. These comments function as a dialogue to compensate for the fact that face-to-face communication is not an option. However, utilizing asynchronous communication for feedback has the potential to be ineffective. More specifically, a limitation of asynchronous communication is that it is devoid of social cues and, thus, information can be misinterpreted. In attempt to limit contentious situations, the professional communicators’ have developed their own strategies to promote productive collaboration in which they establish a shared meaning and understanding of effective corporate communication.

To provide a broader view of the collaborative process for constructing the Delivery News newsletter, the first section of this chapter will explore the multiple forms of collaboration required to create the publication. The purpose of identifying these various forms is not to suggest that communicative responsibility resides within each form but rather to show the different ways in which the professional communicators are invested in the collaborative process. I argue that the professional communicators’ practice of engaging in different forms of collaboration provides evidence of their commitment to create effective corporate communication which contributes to a better
understanding of their felt sense of communicative responsibility. Said differently, the professional communicators participate in meaningful exchanges throughout the document review process with the objective to produce a quality publication to ensure that all their other collaborative efforts are not made in vain.

After describing the different collaborative forms required to construct the newsletter, I then suggest how the core category of communicative responsibility can contribute to a substantive theory of collaboration. Next, I explain the contributions this dissertation makes to existing research. The following section addresses the limitations of this dissertation and offers ways in which future research can improve and extend upon this study.

5.1 Forms of Collaboration

Much scholarship has discussed how collaboration occurs in workplace settings (Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Witte, 1992; Lowry et al., 2004; Jones, 2005). Jones (2005) synthesizes empirical evidence of collaboration that have been offered in previous studies to construct his comprehensive collaborative continuum. The continuum is organized to explore the binary distinction of more to less overt instances of collaboration (Figure 5.1).
However, a constraint of the continuum is that Jones (2005) does not offer a way to differentiate between what constitutes collaboration and how collaboration is enacted. As illustrated in Figure 5.1, the continuum includes contextual collaboration as a header and listed underneath are genre use and document borrowing. Although implied, what is missing in the continuum and Jones’ (2005) discussion is a distinction between theory and practice. Therefore, for the purpose of discussion, it is necessary to slightly modify this continuum to ensure clarity. Specifically, I will refer to contextual, hierarchal and group as forms of collaboration. To provide evidence of how collaboration occurs between six professional communicators, I will refer to specific activities such as document borrowing, mentoring and horizontal-division writing.

**Contextual collaboration.** Jones defines contextual collaboration as involving “the organization itself” and that “any individual’s writing is called forth and shaped by
the needs and aims of the organization, and that to be understood it must draw on vocabulary, knowledge, and beliefs others organization members share” (p. 451-2).

There are multiple instances of contextual collaboration evident within the Delivery News newsletters as well as sentiments expressed by the professional communicators in their comments. Textual evidence of contextual collaboration includes the use of acronyms that are not defined in the newsletter articles such as operating company names, business units, and government agencies that provide regulatory oversight. Such acronyms are used consistently because it is assumed the Delivery News audience is familiar with the jargon.

Also, the professional communicators frequently use the same buzzwords to emphasize and reiterate the Midwest Utility Operating Companies vision. Words that appear regularly in the newsletters are safe, reliable, green, and community involvement. The consistent use of these words not only reinforces the message determined by the business unit’s vice-presidents but also that of the employee community. The reoccurring theme of community involvement is present based upon the professional communicators’ perception that articles that discuss employees’ philanthropic activities are important to the Delivery News audience. More specifically, during an interview with Delilah she informed me that emphasizing community involvement is necessary because the newsletter audience wants these efforts recognized which is evidenced by the fact that they volunteer such information to be included in the publication. Moreover, such efforts are embedded in the culture of the
company and she added that to not cover these activities would be mean that the professional communicators were not aware of their audience.

Jones (2005) defines document borrowing as “collaborating by borrowing from other document, generally ones existing prior to the current writing task” (p. 452). There were multiple comments in which the professional communicators would reference how language from other documents was integrated into newsletter articles. For example in her response to a query from Lauren, Delilah wrote “Lauren- as you know this was copied from the e-mail letter from HR.” Conversely, articles that appeared in the Delivery News publication could also appear in the Unity newsletter. As stated in the process job flow document, Amy reserved the right to use any article written for Delivery News and include it in the Unity newsletter if she felt the article was pertinent and important to be shared with all Midwest Utility employees.

Hierarchal collaboration. One of the more significant findings was evidence of the relationship between the professional communicators’ role within the group and the comments they made. Ede & Lunsford (1990) refer to this form of group dynamic the hierarchical mode of collaboration (p. 133). Specifically, they posit that “This form of collaboration is carefully, and often rigidly, structured, driven by highly specific goals, and carried out by people playing clearly defined and delimited roles” (p. 133). As evidenced by the coding results, each professional communicator assumes a role in the collaborative process and I argue that these roles influence what they comment on, how
those comments are constructed, and begins to provide evidence of why they contribute comments.

Within this group, there were three different roles which include editor, copyeditor, and writer. At different times, both Beverly and Linda served as the editor of the publication. Per the process flow job aid, the editor is the last person to review the document and, therefore, could explain the few instances of overt editorial intervention due the fact that most issues are addressed by the writers and copyeditor in previous drafts. Specifically, Beverly’s and Linda’s contributions only account for 6% of total comments. In those instances, asserting their authority, the most frequent comment function used by both Beverly and Linda were that of directive, 42% and 33% respectively. Recall that a directive function code is defined as a comment in which Reviewer tells writer that revisions must be made. The force of the utterances may be a result of the editors wanting to ensure that certain changes be made to the document prior to be publication. As such, these comments were not to be viewed as suggestions but rather explicit directions as to how to revise an article. When the editors provided directive comments, they were informing the article authors that substantive revisions needed to be made to the document. Moreover, the second most frequent content code that identified for both editors’ comments were that of content: add. Beverly’s comment on one of Katie’s articles provides an example of a comment that was coded as a directive and content: add. Specifically, she wrote “This is confusing. Why is she called out? Did she manage this session? How did she provide a meaningful experience
for student? Did she have students follow her? If so, it sounds like the others didn't do so well. This is a problem paragraph. Rewrite for clarity.”

As the copyeditor, Amy’s only responsibility is to edit the articles after the writers have reviewed the documents. As such, she is not responsible for participating in the weekly conference call or contributing any articles. I refer to Amy’s role in the group as copyeditor because, as evidenced by the data, her comments typically refer to issues of grammar, punctuation, article length, consistency, conciseness, and adherence to *AP Stylebook* formatting and style guides. Consequently, her comments do not suggest or direct any type of substantive revision.

The writers – Delilah, Lauren, and Katie- are each responsible for writing newsletter article and, in doing so, collaborating with subject matter experts, executive leadership, employees and each other throughout the writing process. To ensure adequate and representative story coverage, each writer is responsible for a particular subject matter and geographical region. More specifically, Delilah writes articles that concern to human resource issues, Lauren writes articles about safety, and Katie writes stories about customer service related issues. Delilah, Lauren, and Katie each work in a different state and, therefore, are in charge of writing stories as they pertain to their geographical location.

A significant amount of collaboration occurs between the writers which can be contributed to the fact that they are responsible for the majority of the newsletter content. In their roles as writers, each professional communicator is responsible for
writing articles about specific topics as well as covering stories as they pertain to their respective geographical location. Specifically, Delilah writes articles about human resource related issues, Lauren writes articles about safety related matters, and Katie is responsible for covering customer service related topics. The division of labor for covering topics is not coincidental but rather indicative of their writing abilities and strengths.

For instance, Delilah has over 20 years experience as a professional communicator and holds a Master of Arts in Communication. Based upon her credentials, Delilah’s skills more than qualify her to effectively compose stories that as they relate to human resource related issues. Lauren’s assignment to cover safety issues is directly related to the fact that she earned a Bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering. Therefore, she has a strong grasp of the technical information often included in the safety related pieces. Katie has been employed at Midwest Utility for over 10 years. However, she only had only been employed as a professional communicator for about a year when this study began. The majority of her tenure at Midwest Utility was spent as a supervisor for meter readers and was hired as a professional communicator because of her extensive contacts and industry knowledge. Given that Katie has a considerably less experience as a professional communicator, it is not surprising that her writing skills are not as strong as Delilah’s or Lauren’s. As such, she was given the task of covering customer service related issues which are, typically, less substantive.
It can be argued that their roles as *Delivery News* newsletter writers are constructed, in part, by their writing abilities and strengths and therefore influences the ways in which they mediate collaboration through the comments. As such, each professional communicator offers a unique approach to the document review process. To provide evidence of these assertions, I will refer to the more frequently used function codes for each writer, provide examples of comment construction and explain how those comments are indicative of the role they assume in the collaborative process.

For example, the most frequent function code found throughout Delilah’s comments was that of suggestion. In contrast to her peers, the majority of Delilah’s suggestions addressed holistic and rhetorical concerns. The following comments demonstrate this strategy “I would take this whole paragraph out- it reads like it is to an audience that doesn't know who/what our foundation is. This paragraph is also repeated in the grant winners article... it's over kill on the foundation mission”, “I don't really like the way all these sentences refer to past and not safe rules that OSHA ‘used to have.’ I think the focus needs to be on what they need to be doing today- I would shorten it up to one sentence that simply states that OSHA has learned and improved their requirements” and “This could be deleted. It is a nice extra, but it reads a like a bio, rather than a nice newsletter story. Just an opinion... We usually end stuff like this with a "We wish Terry the best of luck in his new role" or something like that.” In addition to providing comments that referred to more substantive issues, another strategy Delilah employed was the way in which she constructed her comments.
Specifically, as evident in the above examples, Delilah’s comments included a rationale for her suggestions by addressing the context(s) in which the article was situated. The strategies Delilah employed to direct revisions demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of rhetoric which can be contributed to her experience and education. As such, her comments are not only indicative of her role as a Delivery News writer but also as an effective communicator.

The most frequent function code present in Lauren’s comments was query codes. Given her background in engineering, it was not surprising to find that Lauren’s comments usually referred to technical content or pragmatic concerns given the analytic skills required of an engineer. The following examples illustrate these points “What is an [sic] Solar Renewable Certificate? Who do you purchase them from?”, “Delilah will there be places on the road to plug into or can they only charge the car at home?” and “Q: How do we get there?”

Katie contributed 155 comments throughout the comment corpus of which 90 comments, or 58% of her total comments, were made on her article drafts. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that 32% of Katie’s comments were identified as acknowledgment codes. However, what was unexpected was the fact that Katie contributed 70% of all acknowledgment codes. Acknowledgement codes were defined in which an article author recognizes a reviewer’s comment and revises accordingly. The substantial number of comments coded as acknowledgments most likely are a consequence of Katie’s status as the weakest writer.
An implication of this finding is that it provides evidence of the social dynamic that exists within the group. More specifically, it was not uncommon for an article author to revise in response to a reviewer’s suggestion but, as indicated by the fact that Delilah and Lauren only contributed 30% of all acknowledgment codes, it was not expected for the article author to explicitly recognize that revisions had been made. Publicly acknowledging that revisions have been made can be interpreted as a politeness strategy used to develop and maintain a social dynamic.

To better understand hierarchal collaboration, Jones (2005) provides examples of four collaborative writing activities which include: strategic, content, mentoring, and stakeholder. Strategic collaboration “is a specialized type of collaboration that involves larger issues than those concerning the immediate txt of a single document, such as coordinating the release of a document with that of a related document, ensuring constancy among various documents” (Jones, 2005, p. 454). As explained by Beverly in an interview, the primary purpose of the Delivery News newsletter is to support face-to-face interactions between supervisors and employees (Interview 5, 15 May 2009). As such, employees are first informed of important announcements from their supervisors and/or the executive leadership. The messages delivered by management and/or executive leadership are crafted by members of the internal communications department. Newsletter articles announcing such changes are often written at the same time to ensure that the message is consistent. However, such articles are not
released until meetings take place to emphasize that oral delivery of important information is privileged over written communication.

Writing and timing such events as well as constructing the average newsletter article requires that the professional communicators engage in content collaboration. Jones (2005) explains that content collaboration is “collaboration to procure content for a document” (p. 453). The professional communicators who write articles for the Delivery News newsletter frequently consult with subject matter experts to obtain specific information to be included in an article. Such information is used to contextualize the information being presented as well as to be crafted into quotes. It is a common practice for the professional communicators to use information obtained from a subject matter expert to construct quotes. Beverly explained that the strategy for the professional communicators to write quotes and then have the subject matter experts approve the quotes makes the article writing process easier in that when a subject matter expert is asked for a direct quote they often become anxious and hesitant to offer a specific quote.

Throughout the article writing process, the professional communicators can engage in two different types of mentoring collaboration which is “active collaboration with an immediate supervisor or other adviser in an editing or mentoring role, for help on a specific project” (Jones, 2005, p. 453). The Delivery News editor mentors the article writers throughout the writing process to ensure that an article will be approved for final publication. Even though the comment corpus showed minimal editorial
intervention, the editors would mentor the writers through the use of other technological tools and face-to-face meetings. For example, if a professional communicator was having difficulty constructing an article it was not uncommon for the editor and professional communicator to meet face-to-face or talk on the telephone to discuss issues.

A second type of mentoring collaboration that the professional communicators engage in is to consult with the company lawyers. Collaborating with members of the legal team is referred to as mentoring opposed to content collaboration for two reasons. One reason is that the professional communicators have more creative license when they collaborate with others, such as subject matter experts, in the construction of an article. Conversely, the lawyers will inform the professional communicators of specifically of what can and cannot be included in the newsletter. A second reason why consulting with the legal team is not considered content collaboration is that when the professional communicators seek the expertise of lawyers they are doing so to be advised in comparison to just being informed. For example, in the February 28, 2009 edition of Delivery News Delilah wrote an article about a memorial fund that was established to assist a deceased employee’s children. What can be problematic in articles of this nature is how to explain the circumstances that led to and resulted in the death of an employee. Therefore, wording of such articles needs to be approved by the lawyers to ensure that legally the article accurate.
Jones (2005) explains stakeholder interaction as “collaboration with people likely to be affected by the project” (p. 453). Situations in which Midwest Utility Operating Companies employees suggest potential article ideas are examples of stakeholder interaction. The reason collaborative activity is referred to as stakeholder interaction is due to the fact the professional communicators work in the Midwest Utility Services business unit and not for Midwest Utilities Electric Companies. As such, the professional communicators refer to the Delivery News audience as customers in which they are providing a communication service. Therefore, it is not uncommon that the article authors are contacted by employees from their region that would like certain activities and events to be included in the publication. In an interview conducted on August 23, 2009, Delilah explained that the reason why she regularly contributes articles that emphasize community involvement is based upon what the Delivery News audience wants acknowledged. She continued by stating “If we don’t [include community involvement stories] then we don’t know our audience.”

**Group collaboration.** Jones (2005) explains four different group collaborative activities which include: joint, reactive, group single-authored and horizontal-division writing (p. 455). Horizontal-division writing is the best way to explain how Delivery News is constructed given Jones’ (2005) definition that “writers divide work into separate units and then work largely independently” (p. 455). As previously explained, each writer is responsible for writing stories particular topics as well as covering stories that pertain to their respective geographical regions. This section has discussed the
multiple collaborative forms and activities that the six professional communicators engage in to create the newsletter. However, the majority of writing needed and produced for each publication is completed by Delilah, Lauren and Katie.

5.2 Contributions to a Substantive Theory of Collaboration

As cited in Chapter 2, Speck et al. (1999) assert that “More work needs to be done to develop a theory of collaborative writing” and I argue that based upon its explanatory power that the core category of communicative responsibility can contribute to a substantive theory of collaboration (p. xi). Communicative responsibility accounts for the specific ways in which the professional communicators are able to establish a shared meaning and/or understanding of effective corporate communications via their collaborative response practices. Additionally, it explains how the professional communicators operationalize an organizational mindset which requires them to conceptualize audience at varying levels of abstraction. But more importantly, the primary contribution of communicative responsibility is that it explains why the professional communicators actively engage in the document review process.

5.3 Contributions

The major features of this dissertation all have the potential to make valuable contributions to the field. Specifically, few studies have investigated the ways in which
professional communicators collaboratively construct an internal corporate newsletter.

To date, no other study has reported on specific collaborative response practices used to facilitate the document review process. As such, the major contribution this dissertation makes to workplace collaborative writing research is a contextualized, longitudinal account of distributed collaboration. This thick description provides empirical evidence of the ways in which professional communicators assume responsibility in the document review process to create an institutional text.

5.4 Limitations

Due to technological constraints, a limitation of this dissertation was the inability to attribute textual changes to a particular professional communicator at one point in the document review process. The document review process is mediated by each professional communicator’s access to documents via the company shared drive and through the use of Microsoft Word. Because the group utilizes the track changes feature in Microsoft Word, I was afforded the opportunity to discern which professional communicator made what changes to a document. However, as previously discussed, the document review process is only one part of the overall collaborative process of constructing the Delivery News newsletter. Specifically, after the editor has approved each article all the newsletter content is then given to the graphic designer to create the layout in Microsoft Publisher. Once the newsletter has been laid out in Microsoft
Publisher, there is no way to attribute textual changes to a specific professional communicator. To compensate for this inability, I compared the last version of the article available on the shared drive to the final article published.

More broadly, a limitation of this dissertation is that as a case study the research findings are not generalizable beyond the context which was studied. As such, further research is needed to more fully understand the collaborative response practices of professional communicators. Future research could replicate this study by investigating the collaborative response practices of another group of professional communicators using computer mediated communication. As additional research becomes available, it would be interesting to investigate the difference the medium of feedback has on the amount and quality comments. For example, is there a discernable difference between the number of comments provided on a document draft when a reviewer provides written commentary opposed to typing responses?

5.5 Conclusions

This dissertation has presented evidence of how six professional communicators carefully and deliberatively negotiate meaning via their collaborative response practices. These findings contribute to a better understanding how professional communicators function in a corporate setting and how their collaborative processes are embedded in a social context. Most importantly, the key finding of this dissertation, communicative
responsibility, has the potential to contribute to a substantive theory of collaboration by offering a way to explain collaborators’ behaviors.
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