EDITING IN CONTEXT:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF EDITOR-WRITER REVISION
AT A MIDWESTERN INSURANCE COMPANY
DISSERATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the encouragement, inspiration, and support of the many people who have helped to bring this research to fruition. I especially thank my advisor, Edward P.J. Corbett, for his great guidance that began during my first quarter at this university. His example as a scholar, stylist, and man will continue to be an inspiration throughout my career. I also extend my thanks to Kitty Locker, whose many insightful suggestions have contributed immensely to my dissertation and development. I am also grateful to John Stewart for his longstanding guidance of my study and practice of ethnography and particularly for his support and direction through the period of crisis in my field experience. I am also thankful for the guidance of Robert Donmoyer, who alerted me to the possibilities of an interpretive methodology. Thanks also go to Sara Garnes for introducing me to qualitative research, advising my thesis, and continuing to take an active interest in my career. I also wish to thank Donald Daiker for his example, guidance, and encouragement. I am also most
grateful for the freely offered, extraordinary help and wisdom of my great friend Ted Beardshear.

To all of my family I express my love and gratitude. I thank my parents, Arthur D. and Dorothy Writer Cross, for their unshakable help and love. I also thank my daughters, Pascale and Isabelle, for somehow at their tender ages understanding my frequent absences. Without the love and dedication of my wife Jocelyne, this work would have never been accomplished.

Finally, I am grateful for the inspiration and steadfast encouragement of my late grandmother, Gertrude Ryan Cross, B.A., Vassar, A.M., University of Wisconsin, who taught composition at the University of Colorado for many years.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In his review of the findings of fifty surveys published between 1953 and 1984, Paul Anderson concluded that the writing done at work in non-academic settings "is often perceived to be of poor quality" (65). In a 1980 study suggesting the accuracy of this perception, Kitty O. Locker found that well over half her sample of nearly 2,000 letters, memos, and short reports written "at almost every level in almost every division of a national corporation headquartered in Chicago" contained errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, and sentence structure (97). Moreover, widespread problems extended beyond "surface errors." Over half of the examined documents, for example, lacked a "you-attitude," an appropriate consideration of audience. Locker found that while the work of employees hired as industrial writers and editors was generally very competent, other employees that wrote were much less successful. Of course, the majority of
the employees that write in most companies are not professional editors or writers.

Poor industrial writing is a problem of particular importance because writing is a substantial component of "real world" work: Anderson's summary of surveys reports that respondents wrote an average of 20% of their time at the job (30). When H. L. Cox asked why managers do not do something about this industry-wide writing problem, 61% responded that managers do not have the time required to supervise rewriting, while 37% said that while managers recognize poor writing, they are unable to identify the fault in it.1 As John Fielden suggests, managers that are not writing professionals do not have the vocabulary to respond to their subordinates who ask "What do you mean I can't write?" (131)

While many employees and employers who write have significant problems, a vital contribution to our knowledge about effective composition has come from the advice of competent professional writers and descriptions of writing in non-academic settings. Some of these studies, notably those by Nancy Sommers and Donald Murray, as Broadhead and Freed point out (130), along with studies of academic writers, such as Janet Emig's description of the composing processes of high school seniors, found that for their subjects, writing was a recursive process. This process comprised three nonexclusive phases: invention,
drafting, and revision. The idea that the writing process is always recursive gained widespread currency from the results of these studies. Erika Lindeman summarizes this notion of a recursive process as follows:

Certainly, we plan what we want to say before we begin drafting, but the act of writing generates new ideas and shapes new plans. . . . Prewriting and rewriting can occur at the same time. So can writing and rewriting, for we never commit words to paper without changing at least one or two here or there. . . . The process isn't linear but recursive, like the forward motion of a wheel, its leading edge breaking new ground but then doubling back on itself. (23)

At least two important studies of writers in industry, however, while describing a writing process comprising prewriting, writing, and rewriting, refute the notion of writing as a categorically recursive process. Jack Selzer (1983), and Glenn Broadhead and Richard Freed (1986) both found in descriptive studies that their subjects wrote in a largely linear fashion, moving from prewriting to writing to revision. Selzer's findings led him to speculate that engineers' writing processes may be more linear than recursive (185).
But whether or not writing in industry is generally a recursive or linear process, most composition research indicates that revision is an extremely important component of the process. The extent of revision in industry is suggested by the findings of several surveys of professional writers; one survey conducted by James Paradis, David Dobrin, and D. Bower shows that writers in research-and-development organizations devote over one-fifth of their work week to revision. Moreover, professionals frequently revise not only their own documents but those of their co-workers. J.T. Harwood reported that 60% of his respondents had been asked to give editorial advice within the previous two weeks. A vital area of study for researchers is thus the revision processes of editors working with writers in industry. This study will focus primarily on such editor-writer revision.

The need for descriptive studies of editor-writer revision in the workplace is also great because more needs to be learned about the contexts of writing. In "Competing Theories of Process," the lead article of the October, 1986 College English, Lester Faigley shows that educators' predominant expressive and cognitive theories of writing (based upon romantic individualism and information processing, respectively), fail to adequately represent the role of the social context in composing. As
Faigley states elsewhere, "Writing . . . takes place in a structure of authority, changes constantly as society changes, has consequences in the economic and political realms, and shapes the writer as much as it is shaped by the writer. Questions [regarding the writing context] could be avoided as long as researchers studied student compositions, but they arise as soon as we leave the academic setting with which we are familiar" ("Nonacademic Writing" 236). Eminent composition theorists James Kinneavy (13-20) and James Moffett (12) have also stated the importance of the study of the context of writing processes.

The Annual Report

This dissertation describes and analyzes the substantial, prolonged writer-editor interaction in the production of the executive letter of the 1986 annual report of the Auldouest Mutual Insurance Companies, a regional insurance corporation with assets exceeding $400 million in 1986. The document examined in this study is appropriate for an investigation of industrial editor-writer interaction in its "real-world" context: As Auldouest's supervisor of corporate communications stated, "The annual report [is] the most-revised piece we do all year. It is always." She also stated that the executive letter was usually the most-revised section of the report.
Intense, frequent editor-writer interaction is a typical component of the production of the report, an activity that Sid Cato, one of the few widely quoted authorities on the subject, calls a "frustrating, tear-jerking process."  

In order to fully understand the executive letter, it is necessary to understand the functions and features of the report of which the letter is a key component. C.W. Wilkinson, Dorothy Wilkinson, and Gretchen Vik state that the annual report is the most widely circulated report in business; many companies send out over a million copies of their annual reports each year (399). John Stegman notes that the annual report is also one of the most expensive documents produced by business: the design of the report alone may cost $40,000 (3). Arlene Hershman, in an article in *Dun's Review*, states that the typical cost of the design, writing, photography, and type of a quality report is $100,000, "not counting executive time and mailing costs" (63). Cato, editor of the only publication monitoring the annual-report industry, estimates that the average production cost of each report, excluding postage and staff expenses, is $2.42. Cato states that the yearly production of this document is a $4.6 billion industry.  

The primary purpose of the annual report is to inform shareholders of the company's performance over the past fiscal year. The account's financial discussion normally
is not as detailed as is the 10-K, the company's yearly report to the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC). The SEC monitors both reports for accuracy, however. William Ruch cites several secondary purposes of the annual report: attracting new customers, advising security analysts of the company's financial health, and instilling in employees a sense of pride in the organization (258). Richard Lewis says that the annual report is also "a corporate calling card" for dealings with foreign businessmen (11). Also, as Wilkinson, Wilkinson, and Vik assert, the report has increasingly become a very important public relations tool (400). The causes of this significant development will be discussed in the following section citing the problems of the annual report.

Although the reports are often given to anyone who asks for them, their chief audiences include shareholders, the SEC and other regulatory agencies, customers, members of communities where the company offices are located, suppliers, distributors, libraries, contest judges, journalists, educators, students, organized labor, and potential employees.

While the reports are organized many different ways, Ruch lists several standard components: the cover, auditing statement, narrative section, financial tables, and letter to shareholders (259). The numerous subjects of the report include financial data, products, community
charities, wages and fringes for workers, and legislation and other political factors that have impact on the company. According to Cato, it is very important for the report to have a "point of view," or what he calls a theme, which serves as an organizing principle for the data. The writers must convey the essence of the company's "story" for that year.6

Cato states that the average annual report takes six months to produce. An average of 5.6 people are members of the writing, photo, layout and production team. The writers who had produced documents that Cato selected for his nationally publicized "10 Best" list had been with their organization for an average of 8.2 years, had previously produced 7.9 annual reports, were 35-44 years old, and had earned at least one college degree: four out of ten had earned advanced degrees.7

Problems of the Annual Report

Changes in consumer attitudes over approximately the last two decades have had a major impact on the purposes of the report. Economists Leonard Silk and David Vogel report that "during the early and middle nineteen-seventies, a series of events shook public confidence in the American business community" (17). During the Watergate scandal, the SEC sued nine companies for not revealing their use of slush funds for political
candidates around the world. In 1976, the SEC made public that it was investigating thirty other major American companies for alleged kickbacks, bribery, and illegal campaign contributions. Partly because leaders of other major companies did not speak out against such duplicity, the public began to see "white-collar crime" as an integral activity of American business (17-18). What is more, the rampant inflation stimulated at least in part by dramatically rising oil prices also increased distrust by a public who felt that business did not differentiate between "profits" and "profiteering" (18).

Public-opinion polls clearly announced this decline in confidence. While in 1965 the Harris poll stated that 55% of Americans expressed "a great deal of confidence" in corporate leaders, in 1973 that majority became a minority, 29%; then in 1974 dwindled to 21%; then shrank in 1975 to 15%. The Gallup poll found that American business leadership held the lowest confidence of any institution comprised by "the United States power structure" (21).

American business leaders were aware of this "crisis of confidence." The problem was of sufficient magnitude for The Conference Board, an organization of national business leaders, to devote eight of its meetings during 1974-75 to "the question of the past, present and future social responsibilities of business" and to publish a book
on the subject, Ethics and Profits. This publication, itself a public relations effort of sorts, is independent economists Silk and Vogel's description and analysis of those meetings. Alexander B. Trowbridge, president of The Conference Board in 1976, reports that business leaders meeting to discuss this problem "were obviously embarrassed and angered by the shadow these events cast over business in general" (10). Not only were industry leaders frustrated by these events but also by the weak results of the strategies they had employed thus far to regain consumer trust. Trowbridge states that "Even those who had been professionally trained in business schools often felt inadequate in dealing with special-interest groups, hostile media, anti-business government officials, and the new work force" (9).

One result of American business' effort to adjust to what Trowbridge calls the "new 'open society'" (7) is that annual reports have become, as previously mentioned, a very important public relations tool. As Wilkinson, Wilkinson, and Vik assert,

realizing that people are inclined to take a dim view of things they don't know about, management has shifted to the attitude of telling as many people as possible as much as possible.
Indeed, today, the annual report is a major part of the public relations programs of most corporations. (400)

Richard Lewis, who, according to John Stegman (71), in 1971 wrote the first comprehensive text on the conception and design of the annual report, says that the report "provides the impetus for top corporate executives to sit down for the only time each year and define their company for the public" (10).

Many companies have disclosed their annual activities in increasing detail, some to the extent of including the 10-K as a section of their annual reports. Two research studies report favorable findings concerning corporate disclosures in annual reports. John Bagby and Philip Kintzele found in their sample of annual reports that most of the information requested by the SEC was in the reports (25). Robert Ingram and Katherine Fraizer found that although the executive letter and other written text of the annual report provide an opportunity to modify the message of the numerical financial summaries, the text was in agreement with the "financials" in the 79 annual reports they content-analyzed (59). One problem with using the statistical method of content analysis with written texts, however, is that the computer only collects from texts key words and phrases and cannot consider their context.
Despite these somewhat favorable findings by researchers, since the mid-seventies the reports have been criticized for their lack of candor. Ruch summarizes an article circulated by United Press International (UPI) in 1975 that proclaimed in its headline "Annual Reports Tell More But Aren't Always Clearer." UPI in this article called the annual report "corporate management's yearly exercise in puffery and obfuscation" (19).10 The headline of a 1982 Wall Street Journal article on annual reports announces that "Double Talk Grips Business Reports As Firms Try To Sugarcoat Bad News."11 A recent Wall Street Journal headline states that "Firms' Annual Reports Are Short On Candor And May Get Shorter." As William Dunk, a New York communications consultant quoted in this article argues, "annual reports are often more interesting for what they leave out" (Berton 8).

Joanne Wiseman investigated the accuracy of environmental disclosures of 26 annual reports in "environmentally-sensitive" industries. She found that these disclosures were incomplete and "not related to the corporation's actual environmental performance."12 In an analysis of an annual report and corresponding 10-K for a graduate business journalism class at the University of Missouri, I found that Republic Steel had in a similar fashion misled the readers of its 1976 annual report.
While in the report Republic congratulates itself for a year of "significant achievement in the company's pollution control program," the 1976 legal agenda of the firm, disclosed in the 10-K, indicates a different story: In several lawsuits, Republic was charged with dumping cyanide into the Chicago water system, pouring oil into the Cuyahoga River near Cleveland, polluting the skies in Youngstown, Ohio and Buffalo, New York and creating a public nuisance with a waste disposal site in Erie, New York. In the annual report's Energy section, the company showcased its use of coke ovens to produce gas, replacing the need for scarce natural gas. But the writers neglected to mention that Republic's preference for coke gas ovens ran contrary to the law in Cleveland, where a permit for the company to build a coke battery was refused. Republic ignored the order and built its oven. This action brought a Notice of Violation from the EPA, and the matter was still in the courts at the end of the fiscal year.

Another criticism of annual reports is that they can obscure whether or not the company made an operating profit for the year. Operating profits indicate how well executives managed the core business. In disclosing only "the bottom line," or net income, companies can camouflage their core performance by adding the sales of assets, divisions, or stock (Stegman 4-5).
Lewis warns that obfuscation in annual reports can "win long-lasting enmity from the professionals [financial analysts] it has fooled." So the writer of the annual report must perform a very difficult balancing act: "On the one hand, the writer should present the company in the best possible light; on the other hand, he risks doing great harm if he overstates the case" (16).

A second problem of annual reports, cited by Cato, is that too often the document substitutes a "we" attitude for a "you attitude," an appropriate consideration of audience. Instead of "reader-based prose," "organization-based prose" is sent to the readers. The report has additionally been called "an expensive promotion for top management" (Cato, "The Annual Report" 18). Cato cites the example of the 1986 Nafco Financial Group annual report, which mentions its Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Donald B. zumFede (sic.) five times on one page and includes three photographs of him in the first ten pages of the report. Cato calls this presentation "a record in ego self-fulfillment" yet also evidence of a trend of CEO self-promotion (Berton 24). In addition, Duff & Phelps, Inc., financial analysts who were commissioned by Arthur Andersen & Co. to make recommendations for the improvement of annual reports, state that management too often repeats financial statement numbers in the written text of the
report without explaining their significance ("Annual Reports That Fail" 73).

Besides problems with the written product, several problems of the "frustrating, tear-jerking process" have been cited in the literature. Bonnye Miller, account manager for the Northlich, Stolley public relations firm, states that the report can be "a project leader's nightmare" (1). Deadline pressure is often intense. *Fortune* magazine has described the report's production as a "corporate ritual that begins to become frenzied soon after New Year's Day" (Bryant 104). Stegman recounts visiting the office of a Litton Industries vice president who had framed on the wall the galley proof of an executive letter he had worked on for "forty-eight continuous sleepless hours" (1). Deadline pressure often intensifies when schedules are not agreed upon in advance and do not have built-in accommodations for delays (Miller 1).

Problems in conceptualizing the report occur frequently. Theme and audience may not be focused and agreed upon ahead of time. Key-decision makers are sometimes absent from the planning process and then veto the production at the last minute (Miller 1). Often the CEO does not assign the report to a person he has full commitment to, so outranking employees contradict the writer and damage the report (Lewis 22). Also, Miller
relates that even though innovation may be encouraged by management at the outset, companies frequently react strongly against great changes. To summarize, there is often a need for clear direction. Miller reports that "One of the biggest challenges comes in interpreting what top management really wants or expects, versus what it says" (1).

A final problem of the annual report is its great expense. Since 1982, corporations have been lobbying to convince the SEC to allow a briefer summary report. In 1987, the SEC permitted General Motors and any other interested corporations to issue such a document. Some speculate that many companies will follow suit (Berton 24). Half the length of its predecessor, the summary will still retain some staples of the annual report, including a managerial statement. Cato, however, says that as of March 25, 1988, only two percent of the companies putting out annual reports have gone over to the summary version.14

**The Executive Letter**

The executive letter is a standard component of the annual report; its presence is so widespread that Stegman calls the letter "the common thread in all reports" (70). Signed by the top leaders of the corporation, the document is ostensibly the executives' interpretation of the
relevant events of the last fiscal year, although the letters are often ghost-written. Perhaps because of its presumed authors, the communication receives considerable attention. Lewis states that the letter is "the best-read section of the annual report" (20). The Financial Analysts Federation, which recognizes excellent corporate reports each year, stated that all of its annual report finalists in 1979 had "outstanding chief executive letters for both the year and its quarters" ("Qualities of Excellence" 22).

In discussing the purpose of the letter, Stegman cites the precepts of both Lewis, and Thomas Sanders, professor of accounting at Harvard. Emphasizing the letter's informative role, Lewis states that the letter should "communicate directly the most important events of the year, . . . cover[ing] key product, market, and financial developments. . . ." (22). Sanders, in Company Annual Reports states that the letter should show what is really going on in the company, the aims and ambitions of management, the problems encountered in realizing them, the factors making for success or failure, the achievements of the past, the hopes of the future. . . . (39)

In discussing the company's past, present, and future in the letter section, top management, perhaps more than
anywhere else in the report, as Lewis says, "define[s] their company for the public" (10). Sanders states that the letter should be candid: "The President's report [executive letter] should be above all true and sounding true" (39). Lewis says that any bad news should be discussed "in a candid, straightforward manner" (20).

Mark Knapp states that the letter, as an act of communication, comments upon the relationship between its sender[s] and receivers (4). One function of the report is to help "create the authority desired by management to successfully complete the goals of the organization" (Stegman 11). As a key section of the report, the letter often serves the end of "creat[ing] a sense of 'authority' in organizational life." Another political function of the letter is to persuasively represent the company's interests in discussions of pending legislation and elections. As Lewis says, the letter can "serve as a statement of position" (20).

In addition, the letter serves as both an introduction and a synopsis (Wilkinson, Wilkinson, and Vik 400). The fifty executive letters Stegman analyzed all included four components: discussions of the company's financial results, operational highlights, board membership changes, and personnel, usually in that order (82). As a framing statement and an overview of the rest of the report, the letter serves a critical function in
guiding the reader's expectations of both the rest of the text and of the corporation the text presents. One way these expectations are directed is through the tone of the letter. Stegman states that the letter itself sets the tone for the rest of the report (33). Despite the imperative of candor, that tone is most frequently sunny, to the extent that Roger Miller, Fred Power, and Richard Meyer, describe the communiqué as "the inevitable, optimistic introductory letter from the firm's president and/or board chairperson" (149). Stegman found that 6.1% of the words of the letters in his sample were superlatives, while .87% of the words of the letters were "diminishing words."

Lewis reports that "brevity is the key to maximum readership of the letter. Surveys indicate that readership drops sharply if the letter exceeds two pages" (20). Cato states that the average letter of 1983 annual reports was 2.3 pages. The letters of Stegman's sample averaged 1139 words.

The letters typically have more than one ostensible author: Cato states that the average number of signers in 1983 was 1.4 ("The Annual Report" 19). This indication of a group-written product is quite frequently the tip of a very large iceberg and can be somewhat deceptive in another way also. Cato found that only one out of three CEOs actually writes the executive letter. Another 33%
have nothing to do with the letters they ostensibly author. Cato believes that corporate leaders are ethically impelled to write the letter, but Lewis argues that professional writers can save executives much time by creating a first draft, which the executive can then edit (25).

Problems of the Executive Letter

Letters, like the reports they introduce, have been criticized for their lack of candor concerning both their subject and their authors. Stegman's analysis of the language of 50 executive letters of outstanding companies produced the following conclusion: "The common opinion is that corporations exaggerate their success and blame others for their problems. Unfortunately, this study confirms that general belief" (96). Ghost-written letters also create production problems when they are written by a group without clear direction (Miller 3).

Differences Between the Examined Document and the Genre

The annual report the Auldouest Mutual Insurance Companies differs in kind from most annual reports. Since Auldouest is a private company, the report does not go to shareholders, stockbrokers, or the SEC. The report also differs in degree in five ways. Auldouest's report had only been produced since 1980, fifty years after the
company was founded, unlike many companies' reports, which have been produced since 1900 (The Encyclopedia of Management 36). Sixteen pages long, the Auldouest report was probably less than half the length of the average annual report: Cato found that the 1983 annual reports were an average of 39.2 pages long ("The Annual Report" 19). Because the examined report was shorter, its production was not as expensive, although the company still considered the document to be a costly production. The goal of peer recognition was emphasized as one of the most important priorities of the report, a purpose not mentioned in the annual-report literature. Instead of serving as a calling card to foreign customers, the Auldouest report was a calling card for domestic competitors, functioning to maintain its co-authors' social presence in the insurance community. Another important difference was that the report did not include the independent auditor's statement. Normally, the financial summaries of annual reports to stockholders are audited by independent accounting firms and certified by them to be accurate.

While Auldouest's report was somewhat different from the typical annual report, there were six similarities. The report was produced for many of the same purposes as was the report to stockholders. One of the most important purposes of the report was to inform readers about the
company's performance over the preceding fiscal year. An account of one year of company history, the report also served an archival function. The preceding informative purposes were overshadowed, however, by the report's persuasive intent. The document was considered by most of its creators to be more persuasive than informative, and it was used as a sales tool to attract new commercial insurance clients. The report also was considered a very important public-relations tool. It was intended further to instill in employees a sense of organizational pride. Many felt that the annual report, like the report to shareholders, in addition served to focus considerable attention on the company's chief executives.

The report was also sent to 10 of the same audiences--customers, members of the community, distributors (agents in this case), libraries, contest judges, journalists, educators, students, and potential employees. And, although it did not go to the SEC and stockbrokers, the report was sent to some members of the financial community, including bankers. Even though it was shorter than the typical annual report, Auldouest's document was also one of the most expensive products of the Department of Corporate Communications. Auldouest's report also included many of the same features: an impressive cover, financial tables, extended account of company activities, and executive letter.
The executive letter of the annual report differed in kind from a typical executive letter to stockholders for two reasons. First, as previously mentioned, Auldouest's letter was not sent to shareholders, stockbrokers, and the SEC. Second, Auldouest's letter was used not only in the report but also in a "summary annual report" that contained financial summaries and the names of the board of directors. Cato states that executive letters are rarely used apart from the report.\textsuperscript{17} The letter, then, was the only text of the report sent out to the company's half-million policyholders. The letter differed in its emphasis in three ways as well. Several participants in the production of the letter saw the attainment of peer recognition from other executives in the insurance community as the most important purpose of the letter, and the letter was also intended to be a very important sales and recruiting tool. The production of the communiqué was also seen by some participants as an important tradition, albeit one of a somewhat unclear purpose.

The executive letter, nevertheless, was similar in eight ways to the executive letter to stockholders. Auldouest's communication served the synoptic and introductory functions of the standard letter, set the tone for the rest of the report, and reflected top management's views. Like other executive letters, it was considered the most-read section of the report and was
given great attention in production. Also, like their counterparts, both Auldouest's annual report and executive letter were ghost-written and in other ways group-produced with substantial difficulty.

**Group Writing**

After reviewing the findings of 50 survey studies, Anderson concluded that many employees work with others on a document (50). Sampling college-educated employees, Lester Faigley and Thomas Miller found that 73% of their population, which represented several occupational categories, worked with others on documents; 10% wrote with others almost exclusively. Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede found that 87% of the 530 respondents to a questionnaire sent to selected members of six major professions said that they sometimes wrote as part of a team ("Research Update" 6).

While the writing of the executive letter is only an annual "team" endeavor, group writing frequently occurs on the job. As previously mentioned, J.T. Harwood reported that 60% of his random sample of 250 graduates of a small college had been asked to give editorial advice in the previous two weeks. Along with Harwood's findings, Anderson cites two additional surveys that indicate that white-collar workers spend considerable time revising others' texts. C.M. Spretnak found that 592 University of
California-Berkeley engineering graduates said that they spent an average of 10% of their time revising the work of others. Two hundred and forty-five people cited in *Engineers of Distinction* reported in a survey conducted by R.M. Davis that they spent an average of 30% of their time supervising the writing of others (51). Anderson speculates that engineers in the Davis study edited more because they occupied higher levels of the profession and had more responsibility for others' work (51).

Anderson reports that another way that employees participate in group writing is by delegating tasks to secretaries or managerial assistants (51). One survey of 89 managers reported that 18% of the respondents delegate between 31% and 70% of their routine writing projects. An additional 18% delegate 71% or more of these chores. Managers clearly wished that they could delegate even more: 73% said that they would delegate over 70% of their routine writing duties if they had competent subordinates to do the work (Flatley 35–39).

Yet while group-writing is a significant component of "real-world" work, there are few published studies on the subject. Nancy Allen, Diane Atkinson, Meg Morgan, Teresa Moore, and Craig Snow state that "collaborative" or group-writing, when mentioned in the literature, is typically not the chief focus of research (70). The few published studies that directly address industrial group-writing, as
will be shown in detail shortly, for the most part focus on successful collaborations and the benefits of such group activity rather than on failed collaborations and their drawbacks. Be that as it may, a strong potential for destructive conflict exists in any group-writing situation. Of course, history indicates that there exists the real threat of destructive disagreement between and within groups of people. Moreover, forces for both disagreement and acquiescence may be inherent not only in human beings but also in their means of communication—language.

One of the most influential statements identifying the divisiveness of language has been made by the Russian literary critic M.M. Bakhtin, who asserts that there exist in language powerful unifying and dividing forces. Centripetal forces (literally, forces moving toward a center) are "the forces that serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world [author's emphasis] (270). Such forces are pushing toward a "unitary language," which Bakhtin defines not as a "a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion..." (271). But simultaneously, centrifugal forces (literally, forces moving away from a center, opposed to centripetal forces) are pushing toward disagreement, disunity, toward what Bakhtin calls
"internal stratification" into dialects including "social dialects, . . . professional jargon, [and] generic languages." Translator and critic Michael Holquist states that stratification is for Bakhtin "a process, not a state" (425). Through the impetus of centrifugal forces, stratification can become increasingly complex as dialects—large strata—subdivide. Examples of substrata include "languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)" (263).

These forces in language are socially rooted. As Holquist asserts, Bakhtin's centripetal and centrifugal forces "are respectively the centralizing and decentralizing (or decentering) forces in any language or culture. The rulers. . . of any era exercise a centripetal—a homogenizing and hierarchicizing—influence." Centrifugal forces, on the other hand, are "decrowning and dispersing" (425). Clearly, these forces exhibit a strong potential for conflict.

"The processes of centralization and unification," Bakhtin argues, "intersect in the utterance" with the forces of decentralization. Holquist states that this notion of utterance involves Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction of parole (practical use of the language at any given moment) from langue (knowledge of language). 20 Bakhtin, Holquist asserts, extends Saussure's notion of
parole, emphasizing the utterance's historical and social context (433). "It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance," Bakhtin argues, "once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of a language" (272).

Bakhtin regarded the utterance as the concrete product of any speech act (272). But as dictionaries tell us, an utterance is also an uttering, an action. When we consider the uttering, how the utterance is articulated, we note that the published texts Bakhtin critiqued were normally the result of a series of previous utterances--statements and counterstatements--including a first draft and changes made not only by the author but also by one or more editors. When utterance is seen not only as an end aggregation but as an aggregative process, particularly as a social (group) process, then we can see how the socially rooted forces clash or otherwise "intersect" in the interaction of the group members composing the end product. A look at the group revision of a document presents an outstanding opportunity for one to view the intersection of these centralizing and decentralizing forces as meaning and power are negotiated.
Studies of Peer and Hierarchical Editor-Writer Interaction

Since there are so few process studies of editor-writer interaction in industry, let us briefly consider the more documented role of the editor in the process of the initial production and publication of a work of literature. Literary research has often focused on the influence of the editor upon the published text. While many studies show the editor's contribution, many also document problems of both writing process and product that result from the writer's interaction with his or her editor. In fact, one widely employed critical approach, textual criticism, devotes itself largely to discrediting editorially "corrupted" literary texts and establishing as primary sources other drafts that more closely reflect their authors' intentions (Philip Gaskell 3).

An important example of cooperation and conflict in group-writing is the case of editor Maxwell Perkins and novelist Thomas Wolfe. Perkins is widely acknowledged to have made great contributions to Wolfe's work. Indeed, Wolfe himself dedicated Of Time and the River to Perkins. But critic C. Hugh Holman states that Perkins' relationship with Wolfe was also one that included destructive conflict. Perkins, for instance, withdrew his agreement to publish three of Wolfe's short books. Moreover, when Wolfe refused to change the point of view of Of Time and the River from first to third person,
Perkins hired an editor to make the changes. Wolfe did not approve of what had been done to *Of Time and the River*, and after he saw the published version of his work, he wrote Perkins a bitter letter. Wolfe was strongly reluctant afterward to talk about his next book with Perkins (575).

While the study of editor-writer interaction is an established critical approach to literature, on-site research focusing upon editor-writer interaction in industry is relatively new, and few published studies exist. Glenn Broadhead and Richard Freed's award-winning study *The Variables of Composition* mentions that their subjects interacted with editors in a few instances, but this study does not show us many examples of these changes or provide detailed explanations of the editors' reasons for their revisions. Broadhead and Freed instead focus upon their subjects' revisions of their own texts.

One of three published accounts of on-site research focusing on editor-writer revision, "Writing at Exxon ITD: Notes on the Writing Environment of an R&D Organization," provides important information about both writers and editors in industry. James Paradis, David Dobrin, and Richard Miller spent one week documenting the writing activities of engineers and scientists who produced documents for internal audiences.
Unlike this dissertation, the Exxon study does not describe an instance of editor-writer interaction but rather generalizes about editor-writer interaction at the company. Data was gathered through face-to-face interviews, through observations, and through analysis of documents. The study focuses upon texts that are assigned by a supervisor, researched and written by an engineer or scientist, then revised by the supervisor (Allen, et al. 71).

Researchers found that the amount of writing and revising the texts of others done by Exxon ITD employees related to the positions the employees held. Staff members spent 32% of their work time performing "writing and allied activities." Sixty-six percent of staff members' writing-related work was composing their own documents, and 19% of their writing-related work was revising the drafts of others. In comparison, supervisors spent 48% of their work time in writing-related activities, 50% more time than was spent by staff members. More (48%) of this time was spent revising the work of others than writing their own documents (42%). The third group of employees analyzed, managers, spent 36% of their time in writing-related activities. This group spent only 5% of their writing-related time drafting their own documents but spent fully 72% of this time revising the drafts of others. However, the researchers emphasized
that this time was not spent in close revising but rather in "reviewing": managers "oversaw documents in the broadest sense of setting work objectives and deadlines, but they rarely got involved in the composition-editing process itself" (286).

Along with their informative function, documents had significant social functions within the organization. Writing served as a tool of self-analysis, helping the staff members, who were scientists and engineers, to evaluate their work and relations with fellow workers. Paradis, Dobrin, and Miller also state that documents were a means of self-promotion, a way of maintaining visibility with fellow workers and superiors and of selling one's ideas:

Even the most routine document was felt to offer the individual a chance to record his or her own attitudes, ideas and work. Beneath this and similar talk was the idea of legitimizing oneself [authors' emphasis]. (296)

The researchers assert that writing also contributed to the growth and maintenance of group relationships:

'A document helps to fit a person into our organization,' one supervisor noted. By writing an individual becomes a visible part of an enterprise (296).
Paradis, Dobrin, and Miller state that circulating documents was also sometimes a means of stimulating thought along certain lines, creating "a good deal of ferment, political argument, and intellectual exchange" (298).

The researchers described the cycle as a "collaborative, if sometimes stormy, process" (294). Documents were usually cycled between a writer and editor no more than three times. The more times the document was sent to the supervisor, the more tensions increased. The one factor most mentioned by staff members as an aid to their writing, the researchers report, was "a sense of supervisory support and understanding" (295). Yet several staff members believed that the cycling process was arbitrary. This feeling was sometimes due to poor communication. The researchers found that Exxon ITD staff members were much more uncertain about the purpose of their editors' supervising than were the editors. Moreover,

it was agreed that those who did not interact with supervisors in the planning stage of the document generally had trouble in the editorial stage. (294)

Although the study does not describe any particular editorial process, it discusses some conflict that arose in the group-writing process at Exxon ITD. Paradis,
Dobrin, and Miller state that some of the conflict was "constructive" because "it helped individuals focus and tighten up the results of their labor" (300). The researchers state that some of the conflict, however, was not constructive "because it developed into serious employee disagreements" (300). The most widespread cause of destructive disagreements was that supervisors and staff members had not discussed the purpose, organization, and audiences of a text before the document was written (300).

Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede also discuss causes of conflict and dissatisfaction in group-writing. The authors base their discussion on survey responses from a population of 1200 randomly selected members of six major professions. Respondents said that the degree of satisfaction of co-authors depended upon several factors, including the degree of control the writer had over the text, the opportunity to reply to one's editors, and an agreed-upon way of resolving disputes of authors ("Research Update" 75).

While Paradis, Dobrin, and Miller's study does not discuss revisions of a particular document, Mary LaRouche and Sheryl Pearson focus upon a specific act of editor-writer interaction, using this act as a "prototypical" illustration of the power of the application of the principles of the "new rhetoric" to organizational
communication (247). According to the authors, the common characteristics of this rhetoric include "a process-oriented search for consensus from within the group rather than a product-oriented effort to impose a predetermined conclusion from without, an integrative approach, and situational, concrete orientation" (247). This rhetoric stands in opposition to traditional views presenting organizational communication as either manipulation or as transfer of data (247).

LaRouche and Pearson assert that a disorganized trip report written by a middle-level manager of a computer company was successfully rearranged by an editor because the editor saw "her role not as an information carrier but as an analyst and problem solver" (258). The editor's focusing on a company problem alluded to in the disorganized report allowed her to create a hierarchically organized outline with persuasive features that the previous text lacked, including an explicit statement of purpose and the repetition of key points. In identifying and emphasizing what her audience of co-writers judged to be a clear problem and by calling for a response in her revision, the editor made the information relevant to her audience, who immediately agreed that her outline was superior both to the outlines that they had generated and to the original report. LaRouche and Pearson call for a pedagogy of "new rhetoric" that would foster in students
the abilities to analyze situations and achieve the consensus and integration that this successful collaboration exemplifies.

LaRouche and Pearson provide an important analysis of one component of a group-writing process. They do not, however, discuss the completion of the process—the rewriting of the text itself from the outline or any further editor-writer interaction. In addition, this revision was actually an exercise in a business writing seminar that the authors conducted at the company. While the document was a real report generated by one of the group writers on company business, the authors used the document for a group-writing exercise in their seminar and helped to guide the group revision. Thus this group-writing situation was more than a little artificial—an exercise rather than a "natural" process in its setting. Further, while the authors cite important rhetorical theory to explain the success of the process, they do not include the in-depth descriptions of the editors' attitudes toward the process that a truly ethnographic account would provide. To be sure, such "thick description" was not the intent of the authors, nor does the lack of such description take away from the study's quite important and extensive theoretical contribution. But the study does not describe a complete process in a "natural" setting.
Stephen Doheny-Farina's "Writing in an Emerging Organization: An Ethnographic Study" provides a rare start-to-finish description of an authentic instance of group-writing, an instance in which significant conflict was constructively resolved. Doheny-Farina's approach is more typical of the ethnographic tradition: while the Paradis, Dobrin, and Miller spent a week at the site, Doheny-Farina spent several hours several days a week for eight months at the site. Before conducting his research, he had worked also for the company that he later investigated. Doheny-Farina describes the production of the yearly plan of this struggling young software company. The document, planned and drafted by the company's president, was revised ultimately by group consensus.

Doheny-Farina's study demonstrates how substantially social context can affect the writing process, a process that in this case changed as the result of conflict from a predominantly individual endeavor to a group effort. The study also shows the function of writing as a shaper of corporate structure, illustrating "the role of composing in the development of an organization or social group" (161). Further, the study is an illustration of how group revision can become the negotiation of "reality"--in this case of the official understanding the company had of itself.
The yearly plan was a sales tool intended to bring in desperately needed outside investors to fund the company over the next year. While the plan was drafted by the president, the dominant leader of the company at the time, conflicts arose over the draft, conflicts that grew into a struggle to determine the direction and leadership of the company. Doheny-Farina identifies the conflict as a struggle between promotional and production views of the company. The president's draft promised the production of certain profitable products, while glossing over production details. Doheny-Farina states that this draft "set far-reaching goals without providing a production plan for achieving those goals" (170) while the production view, held by most of the other ranking members of the company, "base[d] projections of future activity on past and present performances, so that there was an integrated, chronological sequence of steps connecting the past to the future" (171). The struggle over the final shape of the corporate plan turned into a battle between entrepreneurial and committee leadership of the company, with committee leadership ultimately triumphing, a productive result for the company, according to Doheny-Farina. The reshaping of the document both reflected and stimulated the reshaping of the company.

Although they do not focus specifically upon editor-writer interaction, Allen et al. also mention
disagreements in group-writing. But like Doheny-Farina, they relate only instances in which such discord was constructively resolved. The researchers did two-hour taped interviews with each of 20 employees from industry, government, and academia. These informants had collaborated on proposals, books, articles, legal briefs, goals statements, and reports (75). Respondents were asked to describe a "particularly memorable collaborative writing experience" and chose to discuss only tasks that they believed had been "successful" (74). Respondents ranked themselves as either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their group endeavor (75). While three respondents did mention unsatisfactory group-writing experiences, they chose not to talk about them.

Conflict, nevertheless, had occurred in all respondents' groups, and the researchers acknowledged that the results of group-writing are not invariably good:

Of course, this positive result would not be true for all collaborations. Because these collaborators chose to tell us about successful experiences, their evaluations were necessarily skewed. (82)

During the writing process the subjects often found themselves taking on the roles of various members of the external audience of the document. Unlike participants in groups with a hierarchical approval process, such as those
at Exxon ITD, the subjects of the Purdue study shared
decision-making power, though only in the group and for
that collaborative task. All subjects found collaboration
worth the time and costs. While they reported that group-
writing was very time-consuming and expensive, they
believed that better documents were produced than could
have been done alone (82). Like Doheny-Farina, the
researchers conclude that different viewpoints in
collaborative-writing groups may be imperative:

In fact, a group's effectiveness may depend upon
its ability to preserve various viewpoints.
Weick warns against coming too quickly to
premature decisions about actions to be taken.
(83)

Yet sooner or later groups that share decision-
making responsibilities must agree upon something.
Successful group-writing would seem to be a delicate
balance of conflict and agreement, of centrifugal and
centripetal forces.

The Need for Further Research on Group-Writing

The review of industrial collaborative-writing
literature suggests that we have much to learn about
group-writing, an important, frequent, expensive, and not-
always-successful endeavor in the workplace. Literature
on the executive letter of the annual report suggests that
research that would shed light on the often problem-ridden production of this very expensive document would be useful. The need for further research on group-writing processes and products in their social contexts has also been identified by prominent composition researchers. Lester Faigley calls for research "to study how individual acts of communication (including writing) define and organize social groups" (161). Allen, et al. state the need for a description of "the interaction between the hierarchy of the organization and the hierarchy of collaborative group members" (88). The authors also call for the description of unsuccessful instances of group-writing:

Although a few respondents made incidental references to collaborations with which they were not satisfied, we made no attempt to systematically investigate 'failed' collaborations. A study of such 'failed' instances and their causes would be especially useful to corporations and organizations that encourage collaboration. (87)

Clearly, research is needed to describe instances when writing groups either failed or were only partially successful. Research suggests that such instances are not infrequent: Over one third of the respondents to Lunsford and Ede's survey on group-writing said that they would not
describe their collaborative experiences as "very productive" or even "productive" ("Research Update" 76).

In another article, Lunsford and Ede imply that group productions of documents of distinct genres need to be described so that the production processes of different genres may be compared:

As writers of an article for Rhetoric Review, for instance, we have a different kind of control over shape and substance than we would if we were writing an annual report for a mining company. As with the various types of co-authorship, we think these generic distinctions are important ones that need be explored. ("Why Write Together?" 152)

Lunsford and Ede cite the need as well for an examination of the influence of institutionalized reviewing practices upon group-writing:

Analyses of the role of co-authorship and group authorship which fail carefully to consider the social context in which such writing occurs—the influence of established institutional review procedures, for instance—may distort and oversimplify. ("Research Update" 71)
A Brief Description of the Study

This dissertation investigates the influence of social context upon the editorial decisions of managers and secretaries at the Auldouest Mutual Insurance Companies (pseudonym), a large insurance corporation. Specifically, I describe and analyze the ghostwriting process of a two-page executive letter of the corporation's 1986 annual report, a process that took 77 days. My study increases our understanding of "real-world" group-writing in several ways:

1. Surveys indicate that a significant number of employees edit other employees' work or otherwise participate in writing groups. Yet only three descriptive studies of editor-writer interaction in industry exist, and all have significant limitations. My study describes industrial editor-writer interaction in greater depth than the previous studies. While Paradis, Dobrin, and Miller spent just a week on 33 engineers, I spent five months at the research site observing my eight subjects. LaRouche and Pearson describe a relatively brief consulting seminar exercise in group writing, while this study describes a lengthy group writing process initiated annually by the organization. And
while Doheny-Farina focused his study on two key changes of a document that showed the interaction of four forces, I focus on numerous changes that illustrate the interrelation of over a dozen forces.

2. No detailed description of an only partially successful collaboration has been published, yet as we may infer from Bakhtin's theory and from group-writing research, the potential for destructive discord and acquiescence is always strong in group-writing situations. My study is the first to describe in context numerous drawbacks of group-writing.

3. Researchers have called for investigations of the interaction between writing group members' hierarchical positions and the members' group roles. Like Doheny-Farina's study, my study presents the group-writing process as means of asserting authority in the organizational hierarchy. But my study shows how this result can occur in an only partially successful collaboration.
4. While other studies have focused upon groups that produce texts about which there is a significant degree of consensus by group members, my study focuses upon a text that was determined not by consensus but by a minority of ranking writing group members. One ranking member rejected two other members' final versions of the text without giving reasons to these members or using even one phrase of their drafts. Further, at least one group member strongly objected to the end product.

5. While the findings of the important and influential studies of business writing processes by Selzer and Broadhead and Freed show writing to be a linear process, my study proves that not all writing in industry is linear. The group writers I describe returned to a phase of invention from a phase of revision at least three times as in each instance they began the document again "from scratch."

6. My study is the first to describe in detail the group-writing of the executive letter of an annual report, a document with widely
acknowledged problems of production and credibility.
Notes

1 Quoted by Anderson, 65-66.

2 Paradis, James, David Dobrin, and D. Bower. Personal Correspondence with Paul Anderson. MIT: 1984. Quoted by Anderson, 47.

3 Sid Cato, address, IABC/PRSA Joint Luncheon Meeting and Professional Development Seminar on the Annual Report with Sid Cato; Columbus, Ohio; 13 January 1988.

4 Quoted by Stegman, 3.

5 Cato, address.

6 Cato, address.

7 Cato, address.

8 Quoted by Stegman, 9.

9 Quoted by Stegman, 8.

10 Quoted by Douglas, 259.

11 Cited by Stegman, 4.

12 Quoted by Stegman, who did not give a bibliographical reference for this study; Stegman, 9.

13 Quoted by Stegman, 1.


15 Quoted by Stegman, 10.

16 Cato, speech.


18 Quoted by Allen, et al., 70.

19 Quoted by Anderson, 51.

20 The definitions are Dwight Bollinger's, from Aspects of Language, 15.
Works Cited


CHAPTER II
THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY AND A PROFILE OF THE
PARTICIPANTS AND THE SITE

Culture, as anthropologist William Haviland defines it, is "a set of rules or standards shared by members of a society that, when acted upon by its members, produces behavior that falls within a range that its members consider proper and acceptable" (29). Because writing is a series of choices, as James McCrimmon (5-6) and other composition theorists have reminded us, researchers desiring to understand and describe writing processes need to understand more fully the meaning system upon which writers base their composing decisions. The cultural constraints under which editors labor must be understood before such editors' revisions and communications with writers may be fairly evaluated.

In order to understand the impact of a culture upon its constituents, modern anthropology has largely employed the methodology of ethnography: first-hand observation and documentation of related activities, interactions, and
their correlate meanings. A mere record without explanation is fraught with problems because the meanings of the actions are not explained. Ethnographers call such a record "thin description." While careful descriptions of the observed processes are an essential component of an ethnography, the ethnographer further strives to achieve "thick description," description that attempts to convey the meaning of the recorded act within the social context in which it occurred.

In order to attain thick description, modern anthropology has emphasized, as Dennison Nash and Ronald Wintrob point out, the approach of participant observation (530). As Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (2), and Stephen Doheny-Farina and Lee Odell (508) state, researchers participate in the lives of their subjects for a prolonged time, trying to develop empathetic relationships with informants so that they may as much as possible, as Bronislaw Malinowski said, "grasp the native's point of view" (25). As participants, researchers learn from people as well as study them—the informant, as James Spradley asserts, is the expert rather than the researcher (3). As participants, researchers often assume roles (such as that of an employee) that require guidance by informants, in order to learn what is necessary to operate successfully in the chosen context.
Researchers, however, must also frequently assume the perspective of observers, distancing themselves as much as possible from their subjects in order, for one thing, to remain curious about the tacit meanings of the subjects' routine actions. The observer's perspective also helps researchers avoid a bias caused by "over-rapport" with their subjects (Hammersley and Atkinson 98). One vital means by which researchers achieve a necessary distance both in the field and in their written ethnographic analyses is by considering the relevant literature written by specialists in their discipline(s). Part of the challenge of participant-observation, then, is, as Clifford Geertz writes in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, to produce a balanced interpretation,

> which is neither imprisoned within [the subjects'] mental horizons, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a witch, nor systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities of their existence, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a geometer. (57)

Even if they wished, participant observers could never become solely observers of their subjects or participants like their subjects: researchers inevitably influence the human groups and processes of which they become a part. In another sense, it is also impossible for researchers to separate themselves from their
observations—human beings cannot make themselves "clean slates." First, the human brain is selective by nature—we are not aware of all five senses to the same degree at any given time. The view of the approaching car in our path will receive more attention by most of us than the warmth of the asphalt under our feet, for example. We never are conscious of all that is "out there." Second, as Matthew Miles and A. Michael Huberman stress, researchers come to the site with the preconceptions of years of formal and informal education, preconceptions that inevitably influence our understandings of our subjects' actions (28). The order a researcher imposes on the object of study is often extrinsic to that object.

Third, as Rene Descartes established, it is impossible to separate knowledge from its mode of articulation. As Benjamin Whorf contends, our language shapes our representation of what is "out there." Since there is no human "immaculate perception," the chief occupation of the ethnographer is interpretation.

The task of the ethnographer, according to Geertz, is to "sort out the structures of signification" (9), the cognitive frames with which experience is organized and interpreted. Since ethnographers' data are "really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (9), ethnographers need to document the ways in which their data-gathering
and presentation methods have to the best of their knowledge influenced their ethnographic texts. Obviously, ethnographers cannot begin to analyze or even list all the ways in which such influences occur, but some reflexivity, some discussion of the application of ethnography in a study, is necessary to provide a more accurate context for the organization of meaning. One way to articulate important preconceptions is to write up a conceptual framework before one enters the site or shortly thereafter, a framework including one's purpose for research, research questions, and expected outcomes (Miles and Huberman 27). Another way to monitor oneself is to keep a personal diary separate from fieldnotes, in which one describes to a significant extent one's role in the data-gathering process. Such a diary, an established anthropological tradition, would answer the following questions: What are the researcher's adaptational stresses and rewards? What problems occurred with informants? What strategies did the researcher employ to cope with aversions and attractions? (Nash and Wintrob 532) Later in this chapter I will describe my role in the data-gathering process.

Ethnographers view the researcher as the primary instrument of observation, which is why both the researcher's prolonged participation and analysis-engendering semi-detachment are critical (Doheny-Farina
35). Because context is of first importance, any instrumentation researchers use must be sensitive to the site. Thus, for example, questionnaires and observation schedules, though they may be constructed before entering the site, should be adjusted as necessary after some time at the site to best draw out the tacit understandings of the subjects. Data coding systems designed before entry should be modified to include emergent themes.

If observations are by nature both selective and interpretive, one may ask the question posed by Doheny-Farina and Odell: "How can ethnographers collect valid data? How can they obtain a solid empirical basis for their conclusions?" The chief ethnographic method of establishing validity is triangulation, most importantly, using more than one analytical method and different kinds of data from several sources to corroborate one's inferences. The researcher, as Doheny-Farina argues, must consider more perspectives than his or her own. The attainment of multiple perspectives requires the cultivating of informants. Certainly, a key source of information about a participant is the participant him- or herself. Others who interact with this participant are also important informants (33). If all informants agree on certain points, our belief in the validity of those points is considerably strengthened.
One can also vary perspectives by employing different data-gathering methods. If data attained by these methods all support the same conclusions, then the validity of such findings is strengthened. Different data-gathering methods include observing directly, interviewing, listening to conversations, securing life-history accounts, using letters, consulting public records, and counting items (Doheny-Farina 34).

Conditions for the Use of Ethnographic Findings

Stephen Doheny-Farina and Lee Odell cite three conditions for the use of ethnographic findings. First, ethnographers acknowledge that their depictions of culture are only clips of footage from a very long film: Cultures are, as Edward Bruner and Victor Turner state, "always in production. Cultural change, cultural continuity, and cultural transmission all occur simultaneously in the experiences and expressions of social life. . . . Culture is alive, context-sensitive, and emergent" (Bruner 12). Thus the ethnography is not to be mistaken for a representation of unchanging cultural processes.

In addition, ethnographies cannot be used by themselves to establish the validity of general laws that will predict events. Lastly, due to the changing nature of culture and its interpretations, one cannot anticipate that the aggregation of numbers of ethnographic studies on
the same subject will provide a conclusive answer to any research question (Doheny-Farina and Odell 530). Of course, this condition is also true for many other kinds of interpretive research.

**Benefits of the Ethnographic Methodology**

There are at least eight benefits of using the ethnographic methodology in research. First, ethnographic studies can provide meticulous first-hand observations of human processes in the locales where such processes routinely occur, something survey research cannot provide. Laboratory-based correlational and experimental social research can only claim to provide similar observations if it describes processes that without manipulation routinely take place in its labs. Ethnography, on the other hand, can produce rich analyses of instances of "real-world" writing. Such accounts are necessary because many time-consuming and costly real-world writing endeavors have never been described in detail. A major value of such in-depth descriptions is their specificity. It is impossible to meet the demographer's representative person, who may have 1.33 cars, 1.63 spouses, and 1.13 children. But ethnographic accounts can provide in-depth, if somewhat imprecise, illustrations of statistical trends.

A traditional use of ethnographic methodology, an approach detailed in the work of Barney Glaser and A.L.
Strauss, has been to build theory (1967). By meticulously observing and by participating for a prolonged period in a social process, one can develop context-based, grounded research questions or hypotheses that may then be tested in other research efforts. Another widespread use of ethnographic methodology is for the purpose of testing theory (Geertz 4). By prolonged in-context participant-observation of a particular kind of social process, we may gain a better idea of how adequately theory explains such a kind of process. A related advantage of ethnography is its flexibility (Hammersley and Atkinson 38). Unlike rigidly preformed experimental studies, ethnographic investigations allow one to try out ideas and methods expeditiously and if they are not appropriate for the site, drop them and try others.

Another value of ethnographic methodology is historical. Ethnographic accounts, if properly triangulated, can claim to present to an important extent "how things were at a particular time in the history of a particular group" (Doheny-Farina and Odell 531). Ethnographic accounts are of additional use to humanists because they provide in-depth descriptions of the viewpoints of fellow human beings—they are another village, if not Geertz' country, heard from (23).

Another value of ethnographic methodology, made famous in educational research by R.E. Stake, is that it
can provide information useful to its subjects (Doheny-Farina and Odell 1985). Doheny-Farina and Odell (1985) state that yet another value of ethnographic accounts is that they become part of "an ongoing scholarly conversation" (532).

**Application of the Methodology**

The purpose of my study was to acquire a fuller understanding of the influences of social context upon the editing of business documents. The following sections describe my ethnographic methods for achieving and presenting this understanding.

**Entry Into the Site**

My acquaintance with Auldouest began as a policyholder in 1984. I still have life and auto insurance policies with the company. While considering potential research sites, I was naturally disposed to consider the company. On September 23, 1986, at Auldouest's Home Office in Heetburg, I met with the Vice President and the Supervisor of Corporate Communications. We discussed the research/internship proposal I had sent them a few days before. I proposed to study five writer-observer teams working on various documents. I would work for Auldouest as an unpaid writing intern in order to have an "insider" role in the organization. The benefits to
Auldouest, as I explained them, were threefold. First, I would work unpaid for the company as a writer/editor for four hours each work day for ten weeks. Since many entry-level writers typically made at that time $10 per hour, this work would be worth $2000. Second, I would provide confidential critiques to participants at the end of the study and, if desired, conduct a writing-skills workshop. Consultants typically charged $300-1000 per day for such services. Lastly, my interviewing of their writers probably would make them more constructively conscious of their writing, probably leading to better quality written products.

The Vice President and Supervisor were enthusiastic about my proposal. They mentioned that the timing of my application was apt because the Department was about to begin work on three key documents: the executive letter of the annual report, the annual report, and the yearly corporate planning report. They said that along with observing the editing of these documents, I might also be able to observe the production of documents in other departments. At the end of the interview, they said they would submit my proposal to their superiors for approval.

I saw six advantages in working for Auldouest. Much editing was done in the company, and I would have the opportunity to choose from several alternatives. Also, most of the documents whose editing I would observe were
in the public domain, so I could quote parts of them in my dissertation. Further, many of the documents would be written chiefly for purposes of persuasion and thus would display rhetoric in a natural habitat. In addition, the company seemed very open to my investigation; the Vice President told me that theirs was a very heavily regulated industry and that their company had nothing to hide. Auldouest's location was very accessible for me, a crucial factor in my being able to observe the operation adequately. Lastly, the Vice President and Supervisor were very likable. In fact, at this point one of my few concerns about studying Auldouest was that I might not be able to write with the necessary observer's distance about such nice people.

On September 30, the Vice President sent a memo to the President of Auldouest, requesting the approval of my proposal. The memo described the following benefits to Auldouest: 1) my internship would be unpaid; 2) I would help the company "streamline the approvals process"; 3) interaction with me would help employees improve their writing. My proposal was approved, and on October 13, the day of the first brainstorming session of the annual report, I began work for Auldouest.
Data-Gathering Procedures

For reasons described below, I was allowed to work two instead of four hours a day for Auldouest, a change that doubled the term of my internship from 10 to 20 weeks. I collected data nearly every working day during this period and conducted four final interviews one month after my internship ended. I normally spent six to eight hours in the department per working day, devoting two hours to internship chores and spending the rest of the time gathering data. Since I was at the site nearly full-time each week day, I was able to attain several vantage points on the department, rather than confining my observations to what went on within a certain time slot. Such multiple time perspectives are necessary in ethnographic studies (Doheny-Farina 43).

The formal data-gathering methods I employed were interviewing, observing, and document-collecting. I used three methods of interviewing. In open-ended interviews I asked the participants questions about editing or about issues (e.g. tort reform) addressed in the letter. Once they began talking, I normally encouraged participants to keep going. These interviews were conducted with the informants mentioned and with several other employees. I conducted open-ended interviews first and continued to use them into the first half of my field experience so that I would have a grounded sense of context—so that my
preconceptions would not determine the list of questions I put together later. Following Doheny-Farina and Odell's advice about introducing tape recording into the site gradually and carefully (524), I did not tape-record any interviews for the first three and one half weeks at Auldouest. Most participants were thus used to my presence before I added the potential distraction of taping.

I also did some informal open-ended interviewing while engaging in casual conversations with participants. While I talked with employees informally fairly frequently, I tried to avoid distracting them from their job duties. Since they sometimes complained about the length of the formal interviews, I sacrificed some informal interviewing in order to be able to question participants after editing sessions.

The second formal method of interviewing I used was a version of discourse-based interviews employed by Doheny-Farina (1984). I identified all changes the editors made in a text and then asked them why they made the changes. All of these interviews were tape-recorded. I conducted the first interview three-and-one half weeks after I began working at Auldouest.

The final method of interviewing, using preconstructed sets of interview questions, began as writing a list of questions before each interview. These
questions pertained to the editing taking place and were not standardized. However, I wanted to compare different editors' views of purpose, audience, and situation, so I devised a standard list of questions, keyed to the research questions of my dissertation prospectus. These questions had largely been formulated after I had spent some time at the site, so they were informed by the context. I used the standard list of questions as the prototype for most subsequent interview schedules, although in each case the questions were adapted to accommodate the situation and my increasing understanding of the editing process underway. As will be explained below, this change from unpremeditated, open-ended interviewing to structured, premeditated interviewing was not just caused by my arriving at research questions appropriate for the context at hand. But regardless of its cause, this gradual sharpening of focus is typical and usually necessary as the ethnographer decides what is most important to describe (Spradley 100-01).

I interviewed all of the editors (with the exception of the CEO) and writers involved in each executive letter editing session. In addition, to get their understanding of the entire process, all of the above participants were interviewed after the examined document was approved. I conducted 43 taped interviews. Combined with the ten editing sessions I taped, these discussions amounted to 30
hours of audio-recordings. Through my Alumni Research Award, I was able to have all taped interviews and discussions transcribed; they amounted to 848 pages of data.

A second mode of data collection was direct observation. First, I observed, as well as taped, ten key drafting or editing sessions. Some of these sessions regarded documents other than the executive letter, but they all contributed to my understanding of the editing context of the letter. Participants in different sessions, who will be described in detail later in this chapter, included the Writer, Supervisor, Vice President, Senior Vice President, and President. I recorded observations in fieldnotes and diary entries, and I also dictated some observations. In 100 written and 17 transcribed pages of fieldnotes, I documented the historical and physical settings of the observed editing process, the participants in the process, and the process itself. Further, I identified relevant themes (e.g. the distorting effect of serial communication) and described the relationship of my research questions to my observations of the processes at hand. I also considered some aspects of business-writing pedagogy in the light of my real-world experience. In my notes, I either quoted people exactly or paraphrased them accurately. Most of the quotations in the text come from transcriptions.
In diary entries, I addressed my relationship with the participants, my relationship with both business and academic cultures, and the effectiveness of my methods of data-collection. In addressing my interaction with participants, I discussed my role as an employee, which alternated between writing intern and consultant, and also discussed my research relationship with participants. By the end of the study I had written 76 pages of diary notes and dictated another 118 pages.

My final formal method of data-gathering was collecting documents. All documents were collected with the employees' permission. I collected two kinds of documents: personal documents and official documents. Personal documents, as Robert C. Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen (97) define them, are written by a participant and may reveal the person's attitude toward experiences. Examples of such documents are rough drawings by participants and notes of brainstorming and editing sessions. I also collected official documents: internal and external written communication produced by the organization (Bogdan and Biklen 100). Besides collecting all drafts of the observed documents that were seen by another editor, I also collected memos, proposals, newsletters, reports, forms, questionnaires, and internal news releases. External communication included all annual reports published by the company, the company history,
press biographies of corporate officers, letters to the press and policyholders, press releases, and radio scripts.

**Stresses and Rewards During Data Gathering**

Because the data-gathering experience is the basis for the ethnographic account, it is vital to discuss my stresses and rewards, and my problems and solutions during my gathering of data at Auldouest. As I have mentioned above, I began my field experience with gratitude and high expectations. The possibility of access to several departments, the non-proprietary nature of several of the documents I wished to study, and the warmth and sincerity of the participants made me aware that I would have to strive to be skeptical in order to remain somewhat of an observer in such an environment. I quickly found that not only were the participants in the Department friendly, but they were also able to explain involved insurance concepts to me in lay language, and they were "quotable," providing vivid answers to my questions. My relations with the Auldouest personnel remained polite and friendly throughout my field experience, but beneath this affable veneer, conflicts arose, although in most cases they were resolved.

Many of my preliminary interviews at Auldouest were relatively informal, unstructured, and open-ended. I
often had a short list of questions, and I encouraged participants to discuss anything they saw as related to the subject of editing. Part of my plan was to go from general questions to more specific ones as I learned what was most important about editing at Auldouest, an approach suggested by numerous ethnographers, including Spradley. The other component of my interviewing approach at that point was to ask editors why they made their changes and probe them about any consideration of audience involved in each change.

The Vice President and Senior Vice President quickly became irritated with the questions about audience. They said they had a certain configuration of audiences in mind and that this configuration did not change with any specific correction they made. Hence, they wanted me to stop asking questions about audience. However, their consideration of audiences did change. For example, in his first editing of the executive letter, the Vice President made separate changes to accommodate four different audiences.

The general questions also caused problems, especially with the Senior Vice President. Immediately after I had observed and taped his first editing discussion concerning the executive letter, I arranged an impromptu interview with him. I had not predicted that I would be able to get an interview so quickly, and I had
not prepared many other questions, so I had to stall him by rephrasing questions while thinking up other questions to ask. In retrospect, I realize that I could have benefited from using a technique I learned afterward from James Heap: I could have thought up new questions while pretending to write down at great length his answers.

As it was, the Senior Vice President seemed to feel that I was wasting his time, and he tried to bring his participation in my study to an end by again repeating a few generalities about audiences and telling me that he had nothing more to say about the subject. I had to remind him of our research agreement in order to get him to consent to see me again. And indeed, it would be six-and-one-half weeks before I had access to the top executives' offices again, and I only got access after persistent requests. All subsequent interviews with the top executives and their secretaries were scheduled weeks, sometimes months, in advance and were for specified, short time periods. By that time, I had constructed a lengthy general list of questions that I adapted for each interview. I spent hours of preparation for each interview with the top executives or their secretaries, identifying the changes made, highlighting all changes, and numbering the lines of the text for quick identification, arranging questions diplomatically, and so on. I spent ten hours, for example, preparing a half-hour
interview for Auldouest's president. Because time and knowledge were clearly necessary to prime the information pump at Auldouest, my interviews became carefully structured, sometimes leaving little room for the emergent, although I tried to follow up on interesting leads whenever the time limit for the interview allowed.

While I dropped the open-ended, spontaneous interviews, I did persist in asking questions about audiences. For the most part, such questions were asked only if editors said they made a change to accommodate a particular audience. The Vice President occasionally groaned at these questions but answered most of them.

Although I had to eliminate much of the spontaneity from my interviewing, I quickly learned that I had to adapt to the interrupted, unpredictable nature of observing and interviewing a busy group of real-world writers and editors/corporate leaders during the end of one fiscal year, holiday vacations, and the beginning of another fiscal year. In interviews at the end of my field experience, both the Supervisor and the Vice President said they had no typical routine at work. Documents were edited at unpredictable times, impromptu meetings were called, and so on. I found that the only way to "cover" the action was to spend six to eight hours there every day and extend my internship another ten weeks. On President's Day, for example, most businesses were closed,
but not Auldouest. While I did not want to be there, I stayed all day. At 4:00 p.m., the Vice President, who had been out of town, unexpectedly arrived, and I was able to schedule an interview I had been waiting for days to schedule. Auldouest did not exploit me; the company did not force me to do more work. Many times, in fact, I was not asked to do as much work as I had offered to do in my research agreement. While waiting to speak to employees, I analyzed data and worked on my Ohio State University research-assistantship tasks. Spending so much time at Auldouest helped me build rapport with participants. I believe that they respected me more because I put in the same hours that they did and worked around their busy schedules to accommodate them. By not interrupting the flow of activity too substantially, I was able to observe much more natural processes.

Besides being available, other ways I tried to create an atmosphere of cooperation with the other participants were to talk to them briefly about things they were interested in (e.g. vacations, new cars), always to thank them for their help, and to look for internship work to do. There was no defined, consistent role for me as intern. Although I performed the intern and consultant duties described above, many days I had nothing to do. By volunteering to write newsletter stories and other texts, I showed that I was more than willing to cooperate. Doing
work made me feel that I had more interview "leverage": Since I was helping and accommodating them, it was only fair that they do the same.

Be that as it may, a significant stress of data-gathering was that the participants did not always tell me when key discussions were taking place. As the Supervisor early on told me would be the case, I had to keep her (and other participants) "honest" by asking continually about the progress of the documents, whether editing sessions were planned that day, etc. Having my "office" located in the cubicle with the sole computer printer helped me keep tabs on the progress of a document and provided a place for me to ask questions without interrupting work at some participant's desk. Despite my continuous efforts, however, I was not told about some important sessions until afterwards. Although I was not pleased when I was not told about a session, I remained polite yet persistent in attaining a follow-up interview: I often suppressed irritation in order to maintain a good relationship with participants.

To interview the top executives and executive secretaries who had edited the letter, I had to make additional efforts. When in December I asked the Vice President whether I could interview the President, CEO, and Executive Secretaries, he told me that there was "no way," even though in my employment interview he told me I
could interview all involved. It looked very dark at this point—the two months I had spent gathering data at Auldouest appeared to have been wasted. I brought up the possibility of conducting research in other departments, but the Vice President told me that these options were no longer available. Although he told me that the CEO was in Florida, he gave me no reason why I could not interview the other top executives and the executive secretaries involved. I then reminded him of our agreement and asked if I could speak to the "lowest ranking" people, the secretaries. He told me that he would ask the Senior Vice President for permission. To motivate the Vice President to persuade the Senior Vice President, I used two strategies. First, I stressed the fact that I had obligations to The Ohio State University as a research associate, and that I could not sit around for days waiting for an answer. By stressing my university connection in this and other ways I hoped that he would realize that I could have considerable resources to back me if he broke his end of the agreement. The other approach I used was the "stakeholder" technique (Stake). I knew that members of the Department wanted to understand why the Executive Secretaries made some of their editing decisions. So I told the Vice President that I would give him a transcript of my interview with the secretaries if they agreed to let me give him the transcript. He was
clearly interested in my offer, and he asked the Senior Vice President. The Senior Vice President delayed answering him, and I had to courteously but persistently ask about the request until he had received a response. Finally, 36 days after I had originally requested to talk to the secretaries, I interviewed them. I was later allowed to interview the President, and I interviewed the Senior Vice President two more times. I was never allowed, however, to interview the CEO, and I avoided bringing up the subject again for fear of being denied access to the others as well.

During much of my internship my access to certain participants was delayed because I had to ask for interviews through the Vice President and Senior Vice President. Three months into the study, the Vice President allowed me to directly request interviews from participants. But he also insisted that any interview would from then on be preceded by the interviewees receiving a memo from me stating all questions that were to be asked, and I was not to deviate from those questions. Because the Vice President had started to break our agreement, I now saw each interview as tentative, and I did not ask every "tough" question I could think of but rather asked only the ones that seemed essential. I could not afford to antagonize my subjects. In one instance, a participant claimed that he had written
a draft of the letter and had discussed this draft with another participant. Yet the other person said that he never saw this draft. None of the other participants had ever seen the draft or heard about it either, and one told me that the participant had not written the draft—that he was "not a writer." Since my position at the time was so precarious, although I asked both "editor" and "writer" about the draft several more times, I did not tell the "writer" that his "editor" said he had never seen the draft. As it was, the "writer" told me at the end of my field experience that he felt he had been through a police interrogation.

I also buried such questions in the middle of my list of questions rather than putting them in places of emphasis, at the beginning or end of the list. Because of the fairly precarious nature of the interviews with top executives and their secretaries, I also could not spend all of my time probing for deeper responses to "tough" questions. Instead, I had to probe as much as I thought that I could get away with and then change the subject by asking a routine or otherwise innocuous but important question.

So my field experience became an extended exercise in negotiation. The research context influenced my data-gathering in at least three ways. First, for the most part I had to conduct highly structured interviews and was
somewhat inhibited from following up on emergent subjects. Second, because our original agreement seemed at times compromised by the participants, I found that I did not completely trust them and, as an ex-journalist, fell naturally back into journalistic skepticism, prevented, thus, from "going native." Third, because of the precarious nature of my research at Auldouest, I had to temper some questions.

Although challenging, my experience was certainly also rewarding, and Auldouest was very helpful to me in many ways. The difficulty I had regaining access to the top executive offices made reaching that goal and ending my data-collection experience successfully very rewarding. I also learned that it was essential to create a "good" impression the first time one interviews anyone by having many pre-formulated questions to fall back upon. Executives, to whom time is money, may not be open to unstructured interviews and general questions on writing that require elaboration. A contributing reason for the initial impatience of the executives I observed may have been that they did not have an adequate knowledge of composition theory and writing terms that would enable them to think and talk effectively about writing.

Beyond allowing me to collect 30 hours of taped interviews, Auldouest was very helpful to me in other ways. The company, for example, provided me with free
parking during a prolonged bus strike that occurred while I was an intern. I was allowed to photocopy several documents free of charge. Also, the light internship workload and the delays in the document production and longer delays in conducting interviews allowed me to begin my analysis of the data while I was in the field.

The following thoughts of the Vice President corroborate much of my above perception of my data-gathering at Auldouest. When asked whether my data-gathering interfered with the production of the annual report, he responded that it did:

[S]ure you interfered. . . and we knew that [you would] going in. But if I told you that you didn't faze us that would be a lie.

He next stated that they did not allow me to interfere too much—that to a large extent I had to work around the natural process of production:

Somebody said I've got to get this project out, and I don't have time to answer these questions, and so you had to earn what you got here. We didn't make it easy on you. And I think that's indicative of what we do. We are on a fast track here consistently, and if you would have walked in here and we could have sat around and talked with you seven hours a day, you would have walked out and said, "They don't do
anything." If I was going to do your research, I would rather be in a fast-track place, even though I may have to scramble to get what I needed. But if everybody sits around and looks at the ceiling—as you have found out, that is not the environment in this division.

Data Analysis

I began my analysis the first day of my field experience by considering in my field and diary notes the relationship of my research questions to my observations, what other relevant themes were apparent, and the influence of my data-gathering techniques and analysis upon my data. I also began coding my notes after being in the field one month. I devised three kinds of codes. The first kind, following Matthew Miles and A. Michael Huberman's suggestions, identified data pertinent to my research questions. The second kind identified data that disconfirmed the conjectures of my pre-field conceptual framework. The third kind of code identified other themes that became apparent to me as my participation progressed. All of my notes and transcriptions were given these codes. Sometimes one "chunk" of information was given three or four different codes. Coded chunks were cut from the photocopied pages and filed by code category.
I also entered in a computer database a condensed version of the editors' changes to the text, the editors' stated reasons for these changes (including the audience they mentioned considering), a rhetorical/grammatical description of the change, and other information. I then sorted by audience and rhetorical/grammatical description the changes of each editing session. However, my presentation of data was determined not just by mechanical sorting. In accord with ethnographic precedent, my presentation of data was also determined by an understanding of the context, an understanding I had gleaned from my memory, original field and diary notes, filed arrays of coded data, and from what I had written of my dissertation at that point. The ethnographer is the critical instrument of observation (Doheny-Farina 35), observation that is inevitably interpretive. My data-sorting, analysis, and presentation reflected my understanding based upon my five months at the site.

The Mode of Presentation of My Findings

Just as there is no neutral language of description, there is no neutral mode of presentation (Hammersley and Atkinson 207). Since there is no universal neutral mode of presentation that is best for all ethnographic
accounts, the ethnographer must choose which form best presents his or her understanding gleaned from the participant-observation. Since ethnographic findings are characterized by their circumstantiality (Geertz 23), one logical choice and common mode of arranging such findings is the chronology (Hammersley and Atkinson 217). Events are related in the sequence in which they took place. The ethnographic chronology does not intentionally replicate the ethnographer's sequence of discovering information at the site but rather follows a timetable or developmental cycle or other indigenous sequence involving the participants (Hammersley and Atkinson 217).

For several reasons, the chronology is a particularly appropriate mode of arranging my findings. Hammersley and Atkinson state that the chronology is particularly effective when the passage of time is a key facet of the findings. Because the participants required such an inordinate amount of time—77 days—to write a two-page letter, the sequence of editing provides a rich basis for an analysis of real-world writing problems. Also, because the editing of an executive letter has only been superficially described before, even though the production of such letters is one of the most difficult annual tasks of the corporate communicator, a detailed, sequential depiction of an occurrence of this process is needed.
The chronology is also particularly appropriate for discussing "institutions that are themselves organized on the basis of some seasonal cycle or rhythm" (Hammersley and Atkinson 218). Auldouest's activities were largely organized within the framework of fiscal years; the editing of the letter was influenced by the conclusion and renewal of this cycle. Also, the executive letter of the annual report, obviously, addresses circumstances within this time framework.

The chronology is also well suited for presenting processes "in which the temporal transformation of members' identities is accomplished" because it describes this "process of becoming" (Hammersley and Atkinson 218). Through the process of editing, we see Auldouest's president become a dominant manager of internal opinion, in the process recasting the corporation's external ethos. Another advantage of the chronology is that because it relates the sequence of events in detail, it is especially well suited for demonstrating, as this study and the ethnographic findings of Doheny-Farina (1984) do, that editing can serve as a medium of social transformation.

Nevertheless, since background information was necessary to understand the pressures influencing the editors' choices, I did not employ only the chronology as a mode of organization of my findings. I subsequently
described and analyzed the centrifugal and centripetal forces that interacted to create the end result. These understandings complement the description of the process, presenting a fuller view of the editing context.

Description of the Setting and the Participants

In order to further supplement the chronology presented in the next chapter, this section describes the research setting and participants in the study. I have given pseudonyms to all companies, places, schools, and participants except for me. Occasionally, Auldouest has been otherwise disguised to protect its identity. For example, the net assets of the company have been changed, although not radically.

Auldouest Mutual Insurance Companies comprise four entities: Auldouest Mutual Auto Insurance Corporation, Auldouest Life Insurance Company, Auldouest Auto Rental Corporation, and Auldouest High Risk Auto Insurance Corporation. In 1986, the total combined assets of all four companies exceeded $400 million. More than half a million policyholders across seven Midwestern states were underwritten in 1986 by Auldouest, which began as a small life insurance company in 1918.

Auldouest's corporate headquarters, the site of this study, is located in Heartsburg, a burgeoning Midwestern
city with a population of over one million. The 33-story Auldouest Building towers above most of its neighbors on the fringe of Heartsburg's financial district. Only eleven floors of the building are used by Auldouest's 800 headquarters employees, however. Significantly, the Auldouest offices are split into two units. Employees occupy the first ten floors of the structure. The Department of Communications is situated on the third floor. Floors 11–32 are rented to various other businesses and law firms. The top floor of the Auldouest Building, where I also observed and interviewed participants, is occupied by Auldouest's top-ranking managers and legal council. The 22-story physical distance between managers and employees, between the "authors" and original ghostwriters of the executive letter of the annual report, underscores the fundamental disparity of understandings of the purpose and audiences of this document whose production I will examine.

All of the executives who had offices on the top floor of the Auldouest Building were directors of the company, including the Chief Executive Officer, the President, and the Senior Vice President. In 1986, Auldouest had seven "insider" and four "outsider" directors. Of the directors who were full-time employees of Auldouest, two were informants in this study, and a
third played a central role in the production of the executive letter.

The first informant, Auldouest's President, age 48, had worked for the company for 26 years. After graduating from a vocational college, he began his Auldouest career as a computer programmer, rising though the ranks to head the information systems division and then the underwriting division. He next became Executive Vice President and was elected a director of the company. Newly elected in 1986 by the board of directors to the presidency of Auldouest, he was somewhat of a "whiz kid" in comparison to the previous president, who was 59 when appointed. The President exuded quiet confidence, and he highly valued and practiced a positive approach to life. As President, he assumed the duties of Chief Operations Officer and was responsible for the daily functioning of the company. This responsibility included not only the home office, but also the 15 branches, 1000 employees, and over 500,000 policyholders.

The Senior Vice President, age 49, the second key informant on the board, was also one of the eleven directors of the company. He had attended a major land-grant university, where he took three quarters of freshman English, his only college English courses. A transfer student, he graduated from a small liberal arts college. Beginning his Auldouest career in 1969 as a district sales
manager, he became administrative assistant to the president (not the newly elected President mentioned above) seven years later. One of his endeavors as administrative assistant was to ghostwrite many documents. In 1981 he was elected director of the Auldouest Mutual Auto Insurance Company. As Senior Vice President he was also responsible for the Department of Communications, where the executive letter was written.

The Chief Executive Officer of Auldouest, age 64, although unavailable for interview, is also a central figure in the study. After graduating from a major land-grant university, he saw action in World War II and then began to work for Auldouest as an accountant in 1946. In 1968, he headed the accounting division, and in 1969, he was elected director and treasurer of the mutual auto and life insurance companies. In 1981, he was elected president of Auldouest; in 1983, he was elected chairman of the board and became chief executive officer. He stepped down from the office of president in April, 1986. Probably because of his accounting background, the Chief Executive Officer had a great penchant for numbers and statistics in his speeches and written discourse.

Another participant working on the top floor of Auldouest was the President's Secretary, a 19-year veteran of the company, who had worked for her current boss for two years. She had graduated with a B.A. in business from
a local college, where her writing instruction included business English. Before working with her current boss, the President's Secretary had had several executive-secretary positions in the company.

The last informant who worked on the top floor of the Auldouest Building was the Chief Executive Officer's Secretary. A 34-year veteran of the company, in the early 1940's she had studied journalism in high school. Throughout her career she had continued her study of the language by reading grammar books and articles by popular authorities on usage. Before becoming an executive secretary, the Chief Executive Officer's Secretary had worked in the marketing department and claims department, where she had supervised the stenographic pool. She had worked for her current boss for 17 years.

The rest of the participants in this study worked in the Department of Corporate Communications offices thirty stories below. The Department's responsibilities included advertising (although it also contracted with an outside advertising agency), public relations, agent and employee promotions, in-house journalism, and the production of training and sales texts and films. While the letter was being written during the last fiscal quarter of 1986, the Department, among other things, conducted an expensive radio advertising campaign, produced a quarterly video magazine and agent-training films, conducted a sales
contest for agents and employees, arranged for two
corporate conventions, produced an anti-drunken-driving
film for high schools, and sponsored a holiday parade
downtown.

In charge of the Department was the Vice President of
Corporate Communications, age 46, who had been with
Auldouest for 19 years. A high-school graduate who had
done some college public relations coursework, he began
his insurance career with his own agency. After five
years he became manager of Auldouest's operations in one
state, then managed Auldouest's operations in another
district. He next took a job with several disparate
responsibilities at Auldouest's corporate headquarters and
later became the company's advertising liaison. In 1976,
all media operations were consolidated from several
departments into the Department of Corporate
Communications, which he was asked to head. He had served
as Vice President—Communications for ten years. During my
internship, his department comprised two secretaries, a
supervisor, and four media specialists. The Vice
President prided himself on understanding the concerns of
policyholders and the public.

Reporting to the Vice President—Communication was the
Supervisor of Communications Services, age 37, a five-year
veteran of the company. A broadcast journalism graduate
of a major land-grant university, she had worked as a
corporate communicator for two years before joining Auldouest as a writer in the Department of Corporate Communications. During the study, she supervised the Department's four employees: a writer, a media technician/producer, a graphics specialist, and a graphics/media technician.

The Writer, age 23, who had been with Auldouest seven months, reported to the Supervisor. A Summa Cum Laude English/Communications graduate of a local liberal arts college, she had worked for seventeen months as a communicator for a technical firm before joining Auldouest. At Auldouest her responsibilities included managing the monthly newsletter, writing promotional copy and scripts, and ghostwriting executive documents.

As a researcher I was also a participant in the study. At Auldouest I was employed as an intern/consultant. My responsibilities included evaluating the monthly corporate newsmagazine, writing press releases, writing advertising-award applications, writing stories for the newsmagazine, and providing confidential critiques to employees at the end of my study. I also attended the annual-report brainstorming meetings held in the department and contributed the theme of the annual report. This theme, however, was simply Auldouest's advertising slogan, "we define excellence," which they had already conceived and put into widespread
currency. This theme, which drew upon a long-publicized tradition of innovation in the company, did not directly influence the production of the executive letter. Other participants did not mention the theme in my extensive observations and interviews regarding the production of the letter. The theme is not mentioned in the text. The "authors" of the letter even rejected my suggestion that they mention the company's numerous past accomplishments in a summary on the page opposite the letter. To what extent the theme indirectly influenced the production of the letter is impossible to gauge. But whatever indirect impact suggesting the theme or other actions had was probably no more than any other researcher's influence upon the object of observation.

While it is impossible to completely assess how my preconceptions influenced my descriptions of the other participants, some discussion of the researcher's preconceptions is necessary in an ethnographic account. Before entering the site, my attitude toward executive letters of annual reports was largely shaped by my graduate training in business journalism at the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1978. My instructor, Bill McPhatter, a Business Week staff reporter on sabbatical, emphasized that the annual report was the "Sunday suit" of the corporation, intended to put forth the best corporate image. We were shown several ways in which the reports
could be changed, often through different accounting practices, to represent the company in the most "positive" light. As business reporters, we were trained to examine such reports with rigorous skepticism and to compare them with the company's more straightforward 10-K report to the Securities Exchange Commission.

While I worked at Auldouest, the Writer and I attended an International Association of Business Communicators-sponsored presentation given by Sid Cato, described by The Wall Street Journal as an expert on the subject of annual reports. Cato criticized many reports as obfuscatory and/or dishonest. I had good reasons, then, to strive as I did to be a somewhat skeptical observer, avoiding establishing with my participants the over-rapport which ethnographers call "going native."

An attitude I also retained from my training at Missouri, however, was that the journalist's relationship with business was not by necessity always adversarial. The frequent achievements of business people deserved genuine recognition. If, to paraphrase Leonard Silk and David Vogel, an auto industry Chief Executive Officer walked across the Detroit River, our headline was not to read "Lee Iacocca can't swim." My Missouri training, reinforced by Cato's observations, encouraged my participant-observer role while I conducted research at Auldouest.
Works Cited


CHAPTER III
THE PRODUCTION OF THE EXECUTIVE LETTER

When planned on Oct 13, 1986 the executive letter of the 1986 Auldouest Insurance Annual Report was expected to be completed in about five weeks. But after numerous problems and after complete redraftings by three different people, the letter was approved December 29, 1986. As Table 1 indicates, in the eleven-week process, the participants completed seven major drafts of Auldouest's executive letter.

Not only did the 77-day production process inordinately exceed its deadline, but the finished letter also largely ignored two important audiences: the media and half a million policyholders. The group writing of this executive letter was not more successful because of the interaction of forces that greatly contributed to the end result. Centrifugal forces encouraged conflict and divergent points of view in the group-writing process. Centripetal forces encouraged agreement or acquiescence and a unified point of view.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Draft</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Concept Outline 1</td>
<td>October 22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concept Outline 2</td>
<td>October 24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draft 1</td>
<td>November 5</td>
<td>(Writer's first draft)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draft 1.1</td>
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<td>(Supervisor's handwritten suggestions on Dr.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draft 1a &amp; 1a.1</td>
<td>November 10</td>
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<td>Draft 1b</td>
<td>November 12</td>
<td>(Incorporates Supervisor's 1a.1 suggestions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draft 1b.1</td>
<td>November 12</td>
<td>(1b + VP's handwritten suggestions)</td>
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<td>Draft 2</td>
<td>November 18</td>
<td>(Writer incorporates SVP's suggestions)</td>
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<td>Draft 2.1</td>
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<td>(Dr. 2 + Supervisor's handwritten suggestions)</td>
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<td>Draft 2.2 &amp; 2.3</td>
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<td>(Writer's revision + SVP's handwritten suggestions)</td>
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<td>Draft 3</td>
<td>November 24</td>
<td>(Writer incorporates SVP's suggestions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draft 4 &amp; 4.1</td>
<td>November 24–December 4</td>
<td>(Pres. &amp; Pres. Secry.'s revision, with handwritten suggestions of Pres., CEO, and CEO's Secy.)</td>
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<td>Draft 5</td>
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<td>(Supervisor's new version of letter)</td>
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<td>Draft 6</td>
<td>December 5</td>
<td>(Writer's new version of letter)</td>
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<td>Draft 7</td>
<td>After December 18</td>
<td>(SVP's new version, approved December 29)</td>
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Some forces had both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies (much like an ion may simultaneously contain positive and negative charges). We may call these dually charged forces "convertible" forces, basing our term on the following definition of the word "convertible," from Webster's Third New International Dictionary: "capable of being changed in form, properties, type or use" (499). These forces acted either centripetally or centrifugally, depending upon the situation. During the various phases of the group-writing process, centripetal, centrifugal, and convertible forces interacted in such a way as to prolong the process and flaw the product. In order to consider this interaction of centripetal and centrifugal forces, we may divide the production of the letter into three phases: periods of stability, instability, and "resolution."

**Period of Stability**

Centripetal forces dominated during the first 21 days of the production process, and no major conflicts occurred. But centrifugal forces strengthened sufficiently during this phase to eventually overcome the centralizing tendencies.

**Brainstorming Session I**

On Monday, October 13, members of the Communication Department of Auldqwest met to brainstorm ideas for the
1986 Annual Report and Executive Letter. The Vice President elicited a discussion of approaches to the documents, making sure to get input from all of his seven subordinates. Auldouest's increasing financial health was seen by those participating in the meeting to pose two problems. First, policyholders and the public might perceive the income placed into surplus accounts as excessive profits rather than as a needed financial reserve. Secondly, these audiences might object to auto-insurance premium-increases, especially since the income of Auldouest had grown markedly.

The customary approach of presenting negative aspects of the industry at large emerged as several of those present at the brainstorming session suggested placing counterarguments in the annual report, "defense mechanisms" designed to persuade policyholders and the public that Auldouest was acting responsibly. The Supervisor suggested that the documents discuss rising medical and dental costs as well as other aspects of "how and why we price products." Because of rising auto and parts costs and new laws, the insurance company always has to "play catch-up," said one person. On the other hand was the stable, sure world of the actuarial table--claims that inevitably had to be paid. "But we can't play for the sympathy vote," asserted the Supervisor, and the Vice President agreed.
The letter *per se* was only discussed briefly. The plan this year, as last year, was for the letter to discuss Aulduest in the larger context of the insurance industry. At the end of the session, all participants were asked to contribute more focused suggestions for the letter and the annual report at a brainstorming session four days later. According to the production schedule, a solid concept was to be produced inside of two weeks, and in three weeks (by October 31) the first "composite" or layout was expected to be finished.

While much of the first brainstorming meeting was devoted to anticipating and countering the suspicions of policyholders and the general public, other audiences mentioned were chief executive officers and other executives of other companies, as well as new Aulduest agents. Who the important external audiences of the document were was never established clearly, even though at one point one participant asked, "Who is the real audience?"

**Brainstorming Session II**

Four days later, at the second brainstorming meeting, little again was said about the executive letter because only three participants in the meeting were aware that the Department of Communications was supposed to write the letter. Others had assumed that since the letter was to
be signed by the CEO and the President, it would be written by these "authors." While everyone had looked at the pile of annual reports left by the Supervisor, only the Supervisor and I had read the executive letters.

First "Concept Outline" of the Letter

On Tuesday, October 21, the Supervisor generated the first "concept outline" for the annual report. Not a formal outline, the concept outline was a series of notes first describing the theme of the annual report and then describing the approach to various sections of the document. Under the heading "Page 1: Executive Letter" was the following description of the letter:

Strong, short and direct. Should highlight the elements of the current situation in the industry and our response/plans within that framework.

Here we see the powerful influence of the established approach to the letter: The Supervisor chose to follow the 1984-85 precedent of presenting Aulouest within the larger context of the insurance industry.

Second Concept Outline of the Letter

The emphasis upon the recent financial crisis continued as the Supervisor revised the concept outline two days later. In her sole revision of the executive
letter section of the outline, she inserted the following sentence between the third and fourth sentences: "We are a forward looking company dealing successfully with difficult problems." "Dealing with difficult problems," coming at the end of the added sentence, outweighs any positive emphasis implied by "forward looking company."

As Joseph Williams (109) and numerous other composition theorists and researchers suggest, the most-remembered part or "stress" of a sentence is its end. Thus the difficult business environment dominates the sentence. Mentioning the company's problems, as the Supervisor now planned to do, would make it easier to achieve the rhetorical purpose established at the brainstorming meetings: convincing policyholders and the media of the necessity of increasing surplus accounts and raising rates.

Discussion of Concept With Executives

The Supervisor submitted the revised outline to the Vice President on Wednesday, October 27. The next day the Supervisor and Vice President met to discuss the letter with the President and the CEO in the executives' offices on the 33rd (top) floor of the Auldouest Building (hereafter, "33"). While the meeting had been scheduled for 2:30 that afternoon, something more important came up, and the top executives rescheduled the meeting for 9:30
a.m., five hours earlier. The communicators quickly accommodated management rather than vice versa. Political clout clearly came with rank in this organization, fostering the centripetal impetus of agreeing with one’s superiors.

Taken at the October 28 meeting, the Vice President’s notes indicated that the President and CEO wanted to explain in the letter why surplus was increasing, and they wanted to "hit numbers in the front of the letter"—put financial data in the first paragraphs. The Supervisor later said that the executives "want[ed] to hit the financial end of it real strong." They also wanted to mention "the agents and how much they contributed to our success," as well as the positive influence of cost-containment procedures, underwriting standards, and Auldouest’s auto-parts price database.

The now-centripetal force of presenting a negative picture of the insurance industry gained momentum as the executives told their subordinates to mention that the recently implemented tax reform would cost the industry $7.2 billion. Further, they were to address the national status of tort reform. Proponents of tort reform advocated placing limits on the amount of money insurance companies could be forced to pay in liability settlements. They also advocated establishing a statute of limitations on their liability for damages. This reform was intended
to reduce the huge liability settlements companies often had to pay. The impact of the negative influences of current tort and tax laws upon the affordability and availability of insurance to the consumer was to be discussed. In its discussion of Auldouest's future, the letter was to present the company as making continual changes in order to improve its financial strength.

Going over the entire annual-report outline, the executives asked only for more information in certain places and less detail in others and then approved the concept. November 16 was set as the deadline for the first draft. Those present at the meeting decided that The Department of Corporate Communications would generate a first draft sooner and have the President give his reaction to this text so that his feedback could be incorporated before the CEO saw the letter. Returning to their fourth-floor offices, the Supervisor and Vice President were jubilant because the outlines were often not approved in the first meeting.

Yet in actuality, because points of contention had not been discussed, it merely appeared that all four participants were in agreement. It is important to note that the President's strong commitment to positive emphasis had not surfaced in the general discussion of the document. Given the President's stated lifelong commitment to presenting himself positively and given his
editing comments once the draft of the letter reached him, we may infer that the actual positions toward the letter were as follows:

Picture of a Struggling Industry/

Recovering Auldouest

CEO

Vice President

Supervisor

Picture of a

Successful Auldouest

President

Figure 1
Attitudes Toward the Tone of the Letter

And even though all appeared to be going well at this point, past experiences with the production of the annual report led one participant to keep elation in check:

It is one thing to approve the concept, but this is only the first step. One then looks at the page and says, "What am I going to write?"
To this point not enough clear direction had served as a centripetal force. Because of a lack of clear direction, subordinates were not aware that they were supposed to submit ideas for the executive letter in the second brainstorming meeting. Because they were not prepared to disagree, much potential for divergent views was eliminated. Also, the lack of clear direction from the two "authors" at this point obscured their conflicting views of the company, eliminating conflict at this stage. But while not enough clear direction was now a centripetal force, it became a disrupting force fairly early in the process. In a November 14 interview, after approval problems arose, one participant complained that the executives did not provide important specifics for the executive letter. While the topics of the letter, this participant said, were given to the subordinates, "in terms of actual detail, we weren't given anything . . . ."

The First Draft of the Letter

Given the centrifugal tendency in the company to delegate writing chores to subordinates, as exemplified by the actions of the President and CEO with their letter, it is not surprising that after the October 28 meeting, none of those present wrote the first draft of the executive
letter. Instead, the Supervisor delegated the job to the Writer, a lower-level employee who had not attended the concept meeting. The reason given for the delegation was that the subordinate had had more luck recently getting documents approved by the President and CEO. Memory prompts written at the meeting by members of the Department were now passed down to the Writer. These jottings, however, were intended for their authors, who had been present at the concept meeting; consequently, the help they provided the Writer was substantially limited. The further delegation of the writing of the letter increased the probability of miscommunication, but it must be remembered that only one other link was added to the 6-link serial chain initiated by the President and CEO.

Another centrifugal force may have impelled the delegating of the drafting of the executive letter. On October 27th, one participant said in an interview that the Writer had a fresh approach and lots of ideas. Given the centrifugal "clean slate" expectations, the subordinate might have seemed to have been the person best suited for the task. A newcomer with fresh ideas might be expected to deliver the innovation that seemed to be desired.
Editing Session I

After the letter was drafted for the first time, it was given to the Supervisor on November 5. That afternoon the Supervisor read the draft (Draft 1), looked at notes from the October 28th concept meeting, then reread the draft, writing comments in the interlineal and marginal whitespace. Given the "authors" of the letter and given the Supervisor's prioritizing of audiences, it is perhaps not surprising that of 20 editorial changes, 65% (13) were clearly made in consideration of the President and CEO or, in one case, just the CEO. Three other audiences were each mentioned once to me. These audiences were the general public, employees and agents (mentioned together), and policyholders. Thus specific audiences were mentioned in the discussion of 80% of the changes.

In actions that showed the centrifugal information loss caused by serial communication that was already creating extra work in the editing process, the Supervisor relayed two more of the suggestions that had been given by the top executives in their planning meeting. First, cost containment, underwriting, and automated estimating systems for property and parts were to be added to the causes of Auldouest's 1986 success. Second, the conclusion was to mention the need for continuing changes at Auldouest. The Writer had recorded these suggestions in her notes but had not perceived that they pertained to
the letter. These additions are evidence of omission of information, an omission the concept meeting with the "authors" was intended to avoid.

In an action that emphasized the established approach of the letter, the Supervisor also suggested modifying the company-as-recuperating-patient metaphor (Draft 1a, l. 26) to portray Auldouest as just beginning to get well rather than nearly recovered, stating that the CEO saw the company as only slowly recovering, improving from "grave" condition to "stable," but still in "intensive care." The Supervisor felt that to call this improvement "tremendous" (Draft 1a, l. 4), was "too buoyant." Again the difficult experiences of the past years overruled the business-writing convention of usually maintaining a positive tone. The President's positive attitude clearly had yet to be an influence at this stage.

The introduction the Supervisor had written as a replacement for the Writer's opening lines, while changing the "too buoyant" adjective "tremendous" to "significant," also contained the word "buoyed":

[Auldouest's] operating results significantly improved in 1986. Our financial strength was buoyed by a ____% increase in surplus (Draft 1.1, l. 2-3).
Given her understanding of the writing context, it is not surprising that the Supervisor later eliminated "buoyed" from the Writer's revised letter.

In asking the Writer to add "rate increases" to the elements of Auldouest's 1986 success, the Supervisor said to be sure to add "where indicated," "so that you don't look like you are jamming people for money, which we would never do. . . . [I]t doesn't work. . . . [P]eople would just go to a cheaper insurer." This explanation suggests that the Supervisor saw policyholders as an important audience for the letter. The Supervisor confirmed in a later interview that she considered policyholders an important audience of the letter, rating them a "3" on a scale of 1-4, where "4" is considered most important.

The Supervisor also suggested removing one instance of the phrase "the public must understand," which the Writer had used in discussing a popular mandate for reform of liability laws damaging to insurance companies. In an instance illustrating the drawbacks of peer editing, the Supervisor, however, did not eliminate the following sentence: "They [the public] must understand that surplus is a sign of corporate health, not corporate greed" (Draft 1, l. 28-30). While the Supervisor objected to the words "must understand," she was not sure that her feeling was not a personal preference rather than a professional judgment. She had recently attended a collaborative-
writing seminar that emphasized a peer, rather than hierarchical, relationship with subordinates, and she described her current philosophy regarding minor objections as follows:

I'm not going to change it [the objectionable material] purely to change it. I can say, "This bothers me . . ." [But] if it is good enough, it means a lot to a person that you not chop them to pieces. Let them retain ownership of the piece.

However, this incident illustrates the danger of going too far to avoid conflict. The Supervisor's collaborative peer stance did not ultimately have the effect that she sought. Instead, the words "must understand" were vehemently objected to by the Vice President, who rejected the draft. This objection was largely due to the centrifugal force of participants' different perceived audiences of the letter and participants' different prioritizing of those audiences.

By the end of Monday, November 10, the Writer had revised the letter, incorporating the suggestions. The Writer's actions strongly suggested the advantage of circumventing a centrifugal force by shortening the communication chain. As the result of dyadic (one-on-one) communication, all suggestions that the Supervisor had orally communicated to the Writer (19) were included in
the revision, although two comments written by the Supervisor on the first draft were not understood or heeded by the Writer. On November 11, six days after the first editing session, the Writer resubmitted the document (Draft la.1) to the Supervisor, who suggested only three insignificant changes. The Supervisor, in order to provide tax information called for in the brainstorming meeting with the top executives, then sent the letter to the Vice President-Taxes, who added a sentence on the implications of the 1986 tax reforms to Auldouest.

These actions completed the "stable" period of the document-production process. Several forces had contributed to the dominant tendency toward agreement during this phase. Since they did not know before the second meeting that they were expected to prepare ideas for the letter, four subordinates did not to contribute ideas, and the lack of many divergent views reduced the potential for conflict. While they had initially encouraged new ideas and a different approach, the Supervisor and Vice President decided to use the established approach to the letter, perhaps because of the lack of feedback they had received. The department's opting for the traditional approach to the letter, reinforced by the approval of that approach by the most powerful members of the hierarchy, led to a comfortable atmosphere of "business as usual." The lack of clear
direction obscured conflicting attitudes about disclosure and other "negatives." The "people-pleasing" suppression of conflict advocated by a collaborative writing seminar encouraged the Supervisor to permit the Writer more ownership of the "authors'" document. Fast-approaching deadlines created even less incentive for anyone to disagree.

During this phase, while all seemed stable on the surface, latent centrifugal forces were strengthening, increasing the potential for conflict. The serial communication problems caused by the delegating of the letter down six levels of the organization would soon surface. The Supervisor's concern over the phrase "the public must understand" foretold the imminent disagreement based upon participants' different perceived audiences of the letter and participants' different prioritizing of those audiences. The generality of the discussion with top management permitted the addition of customary "negative" details, fostering the subsequent clash between a strictly positive emphasis and the traditional emphasis subordinating "negative" information. The competing purposes that were not identified in the planning stage were allowed to grow in importance, increasing the potential for conflict. The importance of the letter to the executives ensured that these problems would not be
glossed over in order to meet tight deadlines—the executives had the final say over the deadlines.

Period of Instability

Major Editing Session II

After making the suggested changes, on Wednesday, November 12, the Writer submitted the draft to the Vice President. The Vice President's new plan was that once he had approved the letter, he would take it up to the Senior Vice President. There were three reasons for the new plan: first, because both the President and CEO were out of town for the week, the Senior Vice President was the only executive available to look at the letter. Second, because of his access to Auldeouest's leaders, the Senior Vice President was said to have a good understanding of their intentions. "Running a letter by" a superior before giving the letter to his superior was a common practice at Auldeouest. Last, since the Senior Vice President was responsible for Corporate Communications, it was standard to have him review any of their documents with such high visibility.

At this point the Supervisor did not anticipate major problems, and she had said after the first editing of the first draft that she expected to have the letter ready to
show the CEO when he returned to the office Monday, November 17.

As the Writer left the Vice President's office after submitting the executive letter, the Vice President asked her to bring him his notes from the concept meeting with the President and CEO. He read the letter through once, making a few notations on it, then summarized his feelings: "I had a lot of problems with the letter. I'm not sure that it meets the objectives."

A major reason that the draft did not meet the Vice President's objectives was that the editor's prioritizing of audiences was different from the Supervisor and the Writer's prioritizing of audiences. To the Vice-President, external audiences were most important, particularly the external consumer.

[T]he audience is going to say it was a good product or it was a bad product. Those are the ultimate consumer replies. They have the final vote. . . . [The reviewers can] say we really did a wonderful job, but if nobody is reacting to it, if no one is reading [it] . . . , then we didn't do a good job.

By contrast, the Writer saw only the President and CEO and their "peers" in other companies as the audience. The Supervisor saw both internal and external audiences for
the letter, but the most important were the President and CEO.

Beyond perceptual differences between the Vice President and Supervisor, the distorting impact of serial communication is strongly suggested in the Vice-President's following reaction to the executive letter (Draft 1b):

I don't think at this point that I'm ready to edit the copy. I guess I'm looking at the concept—have we really addressed it and [I'm] saying maybe we haven't. At this point I guess I'm going to have to sit down with [the Supervisor] and say, "What are you saying?" Are we really saying what we talked about, or did she hear something different than I heard [the President and CEO] talk about? Obviously she did.

The Vice President was not aware that the Writer wrote the letter, so he assumed that all the miscommunication occurred in the Supervisor's reception of the executives' advice.

Although he said in a later interview that while editing he did not think as much about specific audiences as about general qualities of writing such as positive emphasis or conciseness, he mentioned audiences in discussing 12 of his 19 suggested changes (over 63%) and
clearly implied an audience in discussing another change. So nearly 70% of the changes were made with an audience in mind.

Given his conception and priority of audiences of the letter, it is not surprising that the audience mentioned most often—in 8 of the 19 changes (42%)—was the public. Given the chief audience priority of the Supervisor and Writer (the President and CEO and their peers), that the Vice President was unhappy with the emphasis of the letter could be expected. Since the Supervisor had only asked her to take out one of her two "the public must understand . . . " clauses, the Writer left one of the clauses in the letter. Like the Supervisor, the Vice President understood the statement, "the public must understand that surplus is a sign of corporate health, not corporate greed," as an indirect command:

The public doesn't have to understand anything. That's not the public's problem, it's our problem. . . . I come from a different standpoint because I work so much with the industry—not just [Auldouest] but outside the industry, trying to communicate to people what the problems of the industry are." I don't tell them why they have to understand them, but I have to let them know here is the problem and here are some reasons it is a problem. Here is
what we are doing as an industry to try to resolve them. But I'm not telling you that you have to understand. . . . All you want to know is "what my insurance costs," and "can I get insurance?"

Because the Vice President was unaware of the constituency of the external audience the Writer thought she was addressing (solely other CEOs), the Vice President mistakenly thought the statement was intended for his top-priority external audience—"the public," or he said elsewhere, "the consumer."

Because the Writer seemed to the Vice President to be addressing the public, her words made her seem to be dictatorial. The Writer, however, seeing her audience as other industry leaders, could see herself to be writing as an equal. To an equal, the clause "the public must understand" might be translated, "it is imperative for us to convince the public." An equal would not be upset about such a statement about a third party. But regardless of whom the Writer thought the letter was intended for, the Vice President was reasonable in his objection because the letter was going to be sent to both policyholders and the media, whose job it is to relate anything relevant from the letter to the public. Hence the public or consumer might be offended by the statement. The irony here is that the Writer on the one hand and the
Supervisor and Vice President on the other both had the same aim—facilitating the "education" of the public. But because the Writer saw herself as addressing top management and two minor audiences, a fraction of the others' audiences of the letter, she appeared at loggerheads with her superiors.

One may raise the objection that no matter who read the text, the text would remain the same—changing audiences does not change the meaning of the text. But George Dillon, in his summary of linguistic research relevant to the discipline of composition, *Constructing Texts*, shows that readers' interests, preconceptions and understandings are indeed an important component of the meaning any text conveys to them. Readers as well as writers construct texts, as much linguistic research has shown.

Given the Vice President's concern with education, it is not surprising that over half of the changes he suggested with the audience in mind were additions of information. He took issue with "we must be certain the public understands the elements that contribute to the success of our operations," (Draft lb.1, 1.36-7), calling instead for a discussion of these elements. He also wanted a definition of surplus, not only for the benefit of the public, but also for the benefit of many of Auldouest's agents and employees who did not understand
surplus. The Vice President also asked that more information be added about the charities Auldouest supported. Besides its "educational purpose," the charity information was included because the Vice President believed that the CEO had asked for it in the concept meeting.

Along with additions, the Vice President suggested three dictionary changes with the public in mind. First, he objected to the word "miserly" in the letter, feeling that the CEO would also object to the word, and the public might associate it with Auldouest. Second, he also eliminated the phrase "corporate greed," another "negative." Third, he took issue with "As citizens, we balk at the cost this legislative environment has on society," desiring to substitute "as a society" for "as citizens." In explaining the change, he confirmed that he desired the public to identify with his company and message:

Vice President—As a society we are concerned. We are implying that, yes, as a corporation we are concerned. But why can't we say that "as a society we are concerned . . . ."

Interviewer—What is the difference between saying "as a society," and "as a corporation?"

Vice President—Then I think that I have made them a part of me.
Other comments reflected the Vice President's goal of projecting a positive image of the company. But in contrast with the conception of "positive" held by some other editors, this positive emphasis relied more upon subordinating negative details than upon eliminating them. The Vice President did suggest dropping the reference to Auldouest's Best Rating upgrading (to B+), saying that the rating was "not even close to where we want to be, . . . almost a negative thing." The company's goal was "A+." But in most other cases, the editor suggested changing the emphasis rather than deleting "unpleasant" information. The Vice President said, for example, that there was too much space devoted to excessive liability settlements. Yet he did not suggest eliminating discussion of the settlements but rather including both the problem and the solution. The problem alone presented a negative ethos to commercial policyholders. The Vice President role-played the reaction he anticipated:

I read this thing, and it sounds like all you guys are doing is crying. . . . We need to tell people what the problems are, but you know I can tell you what the problem is all day long. If I don't give you a way to resolve the problem--that sort of leaves you hanging out there in the wind. I want to know what . . . you are going to do about these problems.
Underscoring the difference between his top-priority lay audience and the top-priority specialized audiences of the Supervisor and Vice President, the Vice President also suggested dropping tax information the Supervisor had previously asked the Vice President-Taxes add to the letter. The Vice President had never heard of the tax terms used, and the implication was that what he could not understand would also be lost on the lay audience of the document.

On Friday, November 14, two days after he read the letter and mentioned to me in an interview what changes he intended to suggest, the Vice President met with the Supervisor to go over the document. He scolded the Supervisor for delegating the drafting of the letter, saying that she had been involved in the concept meeting and implying that she had a better understanding of the objectives of the letter. The Supervisor replied that the Writer had had better luck getting things approved by 33 recently and then added that she had worked with the Writer on the draft.

The Vice President emphasized that it was critical to further explain "surplus" in the letter, in order to placate a very important audience—the media:

I had a reporter call me a couple of weeks ago. He looked at thirty-two companies, and we are the second highest in the amount of surplus.
... In February, we are going to be one that they are going to look at.

During the course of the discussion, the Supervisor amiably yet firmly disagreed with several of the Vice President's suggestions. Rather than use his rank to force the adoption of his suggestions, the Vice President said he would ask the Senior Vice President, who had greater interaction with the executives, to review the unchanged letter, "but I think that it is going to get shot down pretty quick," he added.

* Challenged by his subordinate, the Vice President had decided to confer with a superior about the issues raised—a typical move in a hierarchy. But this action created more communication problems, for the Senior Vice President was not in on the concept meeting with the executives. Thus the Vice President, after scolding the Supervisor for increasing the chain of serial communication and the attendant miscommunication, ironically made the same mistake ten minutes later by deciding to get another absent from the meeting to try to guess what the "authors" wanted. As we shall see, the Senior Vice President's knowledge of the other executives was not enough, at least initially, to overcome the miscommunication due to his absence from the meeting.
Editing Session III

Like the Vice President, the Senior Vice President considered the most important audiences of the letter to be external. However, while the Vice President emphasized policyholders and the media, the Senior Vice President felt that other CEOs, potential Auldouest employees, agents, and company representatives with clients were more important than policyholders. The least important audience were heads of communications departments and press and TV journalists.

Although these were the audiences to whom the document was sent, the Senior Vice President was skeptical about how many actually read the letter and/or report. The letter, for example, would go out to about 500,000 insurees, "theoretically a large audience," but most people would be "too busy" to read it. Whether or not this belief was correct had not been verified. Auldouest had never formally sought feedback from the readers of the letter.

The Senior Vice President supported the Vice President's judgment (see Fig. 2), with nearly half of the changes the Senior Vice President suggested (9 of 19, over 47%) repeating the Vice President's statements.
Senior Vice President
Vice President

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Supervisor
Writer

Figure 2
Alignment of Participants During the First Major Conflict

Because of the clout of the Senior Vice President and the Vice President, the Supervisor was forced to accept the necessity of a full-scale revision. At the editing session and in subsequent interviews, the Vice President insisted that he had not discussed the letter with his superior prior to this first editing session with the Senior Vice President.

Among other objections, the Senior Vice President took issue with one of the tax terms added by the Vice President of Taxes, stating that the reform concerning loss accounts did not affect Auldouest. Supporting the Vice President's educational agenda, the Senior Vice President also agreed that it was necessary to "identify the word 'surplus'."

The Senior Vice President wanted the rate increases that he felt were implied by the letter explicitly
announced, and in order to make this announcement acceptable to policyholders, he suggested adding or tying together several arguments to both define and defend Auldouest's financial position. First, he suggested implying that the market was very competitive. The number of recent bankruptcies of insurance companies was to be cited. In addition, Auldouest's 1986 performance was to be compared with its poor performances during 1983-4. Thus measured against both its own past performance and those of some of its current competitors, Auldouest would be seen as superior. Auldouest would be further contrasted to failing companies by mentioning that it contributed significantly to guarantee funds that helped bail out bankrupt insurance companies. This statement would also show the high cost of doing business in the bad industry climate. The Senior Vice President suggested mentioning that Auldouest also was taking on a greater share of the Mutual Reinsurance Bureau. So through its increased equity it was helping alleviate the problems of the industry. The policyholder also needed to be educated that, according to the Senior Vice President, the stronger the surplus of the company, the more available its insurance. All of these financial arguments thus would make Auldouest's financial status more attractive to the policyholder and CEOs alike.
The irony here is that the previously centripetal "negatives" the Senior Vice President here had the Writer add—the comparison with past poor performances, the number of companies going bankrupt, and the necessity of the substantial guaranty fund payments—were all rejected later by the President. In addition, some of the arguments were to come before the numbers at the beginning of the letter, the Senior Vice President reasoning that otherwise the opening "wasn't very warm." Yet the CEO had said that the numbers were to be emphasized first. So from the standpoint of getting a quick approval, over a fifth of the suggestions (21%) were counterproductive, and the numbers may understate the damage—the Senior Vice President's radical revision of a key area of the text, the introduction, probably eliminated its chance of approval. One would be tempted to say that we see here the consequences of extending the chain of serial communication: miscommunication, wasted time, wasted money. But actually the Senior Vice President was in touch with an audience top management ignored—the policyholder.

Much of the session was devoted to coming up with a definition of surplus, but the Senior Vice President decided that because of the shortness of the letter, just adding the parenthesized appositive "equity" after "surplus" would have to suffice. The most clear
displacement of an audience of the letter was in the decision not to educate audiences more about surplus. The Senior Vice President gave the following reasons for this displacement:

It [the insurance industry] hasn't done a good job of PR with the press. But on the other side, when you look . . . at TV, they've got 90 seconds to give you, and there's nothing they are going to say that's going to do the job. And the newspaper guy . . . doesn't know [understand the industry] and there's more things that he can do that are going to grab more headlines than the positive things associated with our industry. That's not a cop-out. Obviously, we've got to continue to work with them.

While at this point the Senior Vice President seemed to want to give the media some consideration, later he would state that they were not an audience of the document.

On the afternoon of Friday, November 14, less than one working day before the letter was originally scheduled to be reviewed by the CEO, it was sent back to Corporate Communications for major revisions.

The period of instability continued as centrifugal forces dominated the editing process. Perhaps again influenced by the company's custom of delegating writing
to subordinates, the Supervisor communicated her impression of both of her superiors' revision suggestions to the Writer and asked her to produce a second draft. Adding another link to the serial chain had its price: Over 15% (3 of 19) of the Senior Vice President's instructions and over 16% (3 of 18) of the Vice President's directions were not communicated. The Supervisor also made one suggestion, attributing it to the Senior Vice President, which he did not make. Significantly, she told the Writer to eliminate all references to the media. This suggestion furthers the shift in implied audiences, a shift caused by a lack of agreement on who the audiences of the letter were and how the audiences were prioritized.

In her second draft, written Tuesday, November 18, the Writer did not include nearly 37% of the Senior Vice President's instructions (7 of 19), three of which had not been communicated to her, four of which she wrote in her notes but did not include. The Senior Vice President generally expected his "suggestions" to be followed. As he told me, "it's not a matter of negotiation." Over 16% of the Vice President's suggestions were also not included, none of which had been communicated to her. Of the 37 total suggestions, 10, over a fourth (27%) were thus not implemented. By contrast, in the first editing session, all 19 of the suggestions the Supervisor told the
Writer were implemented. Thus, the cost to the letter of adding another link (in this case, the Supervisor) onto the chain of serial communication was a 27% loss of information and the further neglect of an important audience (the media) of the document. On Friday, November 21, the Writer met with the Supervisor to discuss her revision.

Editing Sessions IV-VII

None of the Supervisor's change suggestions recovered the information lost by delegating the letter. The Supervisor did say that the opening two paragraphs did not sound to her like the CEO, but she did not suggest any changes or tell the Writer to change her introduction. Instead, the Supervisor's changes were typical corrections one might expect from any editor of Standard American English.

After the editing session that Friday, the Writer made her revisions and, since the Vice President was out of town, sent the draft directly to the Senior Vice President. He made four additional suggestions, which he explained to the Writer when he brought the letter down to her on the following Monday, November 24. Predictably, some suggestions were repeats. He again asked that the influence of equity upon insurance affordability and availability be explained. He also objected, as the Vice
President had earlier, to the statement asserting that employee and agent input were solely responsible for the year's success. Managerial decisions contributed also, he said. Like the Supervisor, the Senior Vice President expressed concern about the introduction. He said that the bad condition of the industry was overgeneralized in the first two paragraphs and that the Writer should add that some companies were rebuilding their equity. This statement would "tie into the fact that [Auldouest] was also in that process."

The Writer's second paragraph presents a positive point of view: "For [Auldouest], 1986 held challenges, not crises. We saw hurdles to be faced and overcome, not obstacles that blocked the road to financial strength." But the Senior Vice President suggested replacing this paragraph, giving the Writer the following sentence as a model indicating the kind of replacement he wanted:

For others, it was a year of partial recovery from previous year [sic] horrendous underwriting losses and the associated decline in equity, which has affected the availability and affordability of insurance products.

[Auldouest's] operating results improved significantly during 1986.

The Senior Vice President's statement attempts to realize a previously ignored suggestion: To show the
relationship between liability settlements, equity, availability, and affordability. In doing so the statement would "educate" the reader, a particular goal of the Vice President. Such a statement would be a step toward placating media critics, an audience that was beginning to be ignored.

The Writer revised the letter, incorporating all of the Senior Vice President's suggestions except for some of those for the introduction. Her revision of the second paragraph read

Other companies saw only a partial recovery from the underwriting losses and declines in equity that have plagued the industry for the past few years.

She did not show the relationship between the financial concepts in this second paragraph because she believed that the elements were defined later in the text. But these elements were no more defined later than they were in the Senior Vice President's "model" statement. While the impact of liability settlements, the necessity of surplus, and the importance of affordability and availability are mentioned later in the text, the relationship between the elements is not explicit. Because the information is not put in what George Dillon calls a "schema," a pattern (cause and effect, in this case) by which the mind organizes experience, there is not
much chance of the knowledge's being retained (52). Two other local (text-level) functions of a schema would have made placing it early in the letter effective. First, the schema serves to integrate information, adding coherence to the text (52). So without this integrator, the reader does not easily divine the interrelation of the components. Second, the schema helps the reader predict similar patterns later in the text (52), boosting readability. Thus, placing the schema early in the text would have made the later supporting information more coherent and processible. Furthermore, the reader's replication of the Writer's way of organizing experience would probably cause more identification, more persuasion. Had the Senior Vice President not delegated the final phrasing of the paragraph, the message would probably have been at least slightly more effective.

After the Writer met with the Senior Vice President, she made her revisions to the letter, finishing by the end of the day. The Writer subsequently gave the letter to the Supervisor, who reviewed it and then told the Writer to send it to the President and CEO for approval.

Because I was not given access to the executive secretaries until six weeks after the editing of Draft 3, not given access to the President until nine and one half weeks after the editing, and never given access to the CEO (who was spending several months in Florida), I could not
determine the exact dates of the following events, which occurred between November 25, when the letter was sent up, and December 4, when it was returned to Corporate Communications. The secretaries and the President also fairly frequently had difficulty identifying who made what change in the letter.

The first person to see Draft 3 in the executive offices was the President's Secretary. Although she conferred with the CEO's Secretary in at least one instance, the President's Secretary suggested most of the changes made to the draft. After making the changes, she retyped the letter; it was then edited again by the CEO's Secretary, the President, and the CEO.

The President said that his secretary normally read all letters that he signed:

[U]sually when a document comes up for me—that is going to come out under my name—what I normally do is ask [the President's Secretary] to look through and see if there is anything that she thinks should be brought to my attention.

Every time he delegated the writing of the letter, the President automatically added two links to the chain of serial communication—a ghost writer and a ghost editor (his secretary). In this case, because the two secretaries collaborated, yet another link was added to
the serial chain. Now eight were involved in the production of this "personal, subjective" letter—the "authors," plus the six who had given their input into the three drafts generated before one of the "authors" saw a draft.

Unlike the more specialized audiences identified by other contributors to the letter, the President's Secretary identified one broad audience—the public. She said that she tried to think about that audience during editing. But she was sure she didn't all the time, "just depending on if I'm in a hurry."

Most of the changes were typical corrections made by secretaries when they proofread a text. Over half of the changes the President's Secretary and the CEO's Secretary explained concerned matters of syntax or logic (55%, 11 of 20), although their "logic" was sometimes based upon assumptions others in the organization would not share. For example, the President's Secretary changed "As [Auldouest] works to improve internal operations," to "As the management team works to improve internal operations." She ignored the possibility that anyone else in the company would work to improve internal operations, even though the company strongly promoted its Outstanding Suggestion Program, which elicited employee advice for improving internal operations. The President's Secretary's thinking illustrates the isolation of the
executive office staff from the rest of the employees, a
collection the writers in Corporate Communications often
complained about. Reasoning that training facilities
could be external as well as internal, the secretaries
deleted "in-house" from a statement spotlighting
Auldouest's in-house training programs, interfering with
the instructions of the Senior Vice President, who had
told the Supervisor to mention internal training
facilities.

Acting as a typical editor in three other instances,
the President's Secretary wisely substituted "we" or "our"
for "Auldouest" or "Auldouest's." She reasoned that since
the document is obviously from the company, its name need
not be mentioned often. The President's Secretary also
made the following substitution: "Rates were increased
where indicated necessary..." (my emphasis, strike
out=delete, underline=insert) (Draft 3, 1.15). Rate
increases now appear less arbitrary. This change would
encourage a more sympathetic audience reaction to
increased premiums.

As previously stated, because of difficulties in
gaining access to participants on "33," I cannot identify
which participant made certain corrections, including the
following changes made in the first editing session.
Faulty parallelism was the reason given for three of the
five syntactical changes made to Draft 3. In one
sentence, the article "the" replaced two different articles, "a" and "the" in coordinate units. However, the article was added to two of the four units in the series, making the edited structure nonparallel (Draft 4, 1.18-21):

The installation of a new mainframe computer system, the rewrite of commercial policies, expansion of claims training facilities, and other operational improvements have put us in a stronger position for the future.

Thus this change did not correct the problem. In another case, a proper noun and its explanation, "the Auldvoice (R) auto repair estimating system," were replaced by a generic common noun and combined into an even longer noun string (Draft 4, 1.16-17): "computerized auto and property repair estimating systems." Joseph Williams states that such long compound noun phrases are a common source of confusion in scholarly and technical writing, "keep[ing] [writers] from linking one idea to another clearly and explicitly" (22).

An interesting reason was given for making the following syntactical change: "As [Auldouest] works to improve internal operations, several external elements continue to have an impact on our industry and which demand our attention" (Draft 4, 1.22-23). The CEO's Secretary felt that "which" modified elements better than
"and" did. But "and" does not modify anything.

Misplacement of the adjectival restrictive clause "which demand our attention" is yet another example of the partially counterproductive results of serial communication.

Some corrections of Draft 3's diction were also unnecessary, including the following:

The continued dedication of our agents and employees, coupled with strategic operational and management decisions, coupled with strategical decisions, will help us to face the challenges of 1987 and beyond (Dr 3, 1. 60-62).

No reason was given for the change, which de-emphasizes management, thwarting the Senior Vice President's previous request to emphasize management in that sentence.

Although she may not have made the change, the CEO's Secretary indicated her faulty understanding of the usage of "inexorably" when she gave her reason for substituting "closely" in the following clause: "surplus and the availability of insurance coverages are inexorably linked" (Draft 3, 1.38-39). She stated that "inexorably" meant "continuing," however, Webster's New World Dictionary, a common reference, defines "inexorable" as something that "cannot be altered, checked, etc." (310). Semantically, the word is appropriate, although it may be too formal for business writing. Moreover, the change was desirable for
this reason: "I didn't make the change... but 'inexoritantly' [sic] is not a word that I would use...," the President said in a later interview.

Three of the changes in Draft 3 cut needless words. One such change saved considerable space.

"[E]mployees and agents offer valuable input regarding the best action to take at every level of the organization" (Draft 3, 1.56-58).

No one took credit for deleting the announcement of the loss of a 20% tax deduction for The Auldouest Life Insurance Company. The editor could have been either of the secretaries or the President. However, in this change we notice that a significantly negative detail is not subordinated but rather is eliminated. This trend continues and accelerates markedly in the President's editing of the Draft 3 and Draft 4, watershed events after which the references to the "negative" past and present business climate are almost eliminated from the letter.

**Editing Session VIII**

It is not clear whether the CEO and the CEO's Secretary each edited the draft separately or whether they edited it together. However, the CEO's Secretary identified several changes that she remembered making in
the document. Rather than seeing herself as a writer of documents, the secretary considered herself primarily an editor. She said that when she was given documents, she looked for anything "incorrect or not easily understood."

"Sentence structure and spelling and grammar are more my long suite," she said. Others in the organization verified her editorial role. The Vice President said that the CEO's Secretary "will be the first one to admit to you that she cannot do original writing. But she is a great one to blue pencil."

Because of her secretarial job and her perception of her role, it is not surprising that most of the CEO's Secretary's changes concerned what she believed to be the rules of Standard Edited American English. Unlike previous editors, she did not add information but rather concerned herself with the correction of surface errors, actual and perceived. The only audience that she mentioned was the CEO, and he was mentioned only in the explanation of 2 (7%) of her 27 changes, and these changes were minor.

It must be stressed that the majority of her changes were helpful (81.5%). Nevertheless, five of the secretary's changes were unnecessary (18.5%), based upon erroneous perceptions of Standard Edited American English. Four of these changes involved semantic misunderstandings. In one case she substituted "halt" for "stop" because she
believed that "to stop" meant "to halt temporarily." The relative clause in "crises that could not be overcome" was also dropped because she believed that crises, by definition, could not be overcome. "Tax considerations" was substituted for "tax provisions" because the editor reasoned that taxes do not provide but rather remove. But the sense of "provisions" as legal stipulations makes the original phrasing legitimate.

Her final unnecessary change was this deletion: "Some may view surplus as corporate wealth. . . ." The editor said that the revised statement was more straightforward. But the editor implies that those equating surplus with wealth are ignorant, and a straightforward castigation is not the way to "educate" the misinformed. While the CEO's Secretary is just making more definite a statement that is implied by the rest of the paragraph, making a rhetorical error more absolute cannot be considered to be an improvement to the text.

The remaining changes were the kind any good editor would make. In one instance, for example she deleted the word "new" from the phrase "these new tax revisions" because their recent enactment had already been mentioned.

While both secretaries made some very useful contributions to the letter, their unnecessary "blue penciling" also damaged the appearance of the draft of the letter before it reached its approvers. Their
idiosyncratic notions of Standard Edited American English worked centrifugally: they contributed to disagreement and rejection.

Because he was unavailable for interview, my information about the CEO comes from other sources. The most widespread belief about the CEO's editorial preferences was that he liked plenty of statistics and other numbers in the text. He also had previously evinced a candid, "conservative" view of the industry and of Auldouest's financial condition.

Only one suggestion regarding Draft 4 could be identified clearly as the CEO's. He wanted the 1986 financial performance of the four Auldouest companies discussed and emphasized. What this entailed was adding more statistics and other numbers. Thus the major influence the CEO seems to have had was to embellish the financial discussion in the letter, an unsurprising eventuality given his predilection for numbers. The CEO's Secretary, while making numerous changes, primarily was concerned with local rather than global features of the text, again a focus one might expect, given her position and her perception of her role. The global input of these two editors thus was minimal; instead, statistics were added here, verbiage removed there. When Draft 4 was returned to the President, it still began by emphasizing
difficulties, an approach used in the executive letter for several years.

Apparently after the CEO and his secretary had edited the letter, the President read the changes penciled onto Draft 4 and made a few more of his own. The President could only remember suggesting five changes, adding that he might have made another one. Nevertheless, most of these suggestions were revolutionary, contributing to a global change that emphasized certain audiences and purposes and ignored others. For some audiences of the letter, this change shifted the predominant rhetoric of the text.

The President's perception of the audiences of the letter and his prioritizing of those audiences clearly differed from the Vice President's audiences and prioritizing of those audiences, even though the President said that he did not rate the importance of different audiences of this document. The audience he mentioned first and most frequently was CEOs and other high-echelon managers of other insurance companies. Additional audiences were business interests, chamber of commerce people, Auldouest's agency force, and "maybe a few families and friends."

When asked about the interests of his audiences, the President's response was telling:
You are trying to project as positive a picture of your company as you can, whether it be your business client or a peer. That's what we are trying to do and [to] make [the] company look as successful as we are. . . . [A] lot of people have come in here and talked to myself or [the CEO], I get a lot of comments from other companies, "How in the world did Auldouest turn this thing around so fast?" So those are the kind of things we are trying to get across to the audience.

In this response, the President first mentions the image he wants to project, rather than analyzes his audience. It also appears that the President's top-priority audience is high-echelon managers in other companies.

Both of these factors suggest why to policyholders and the media the President's version of the letter would be what Linda Flower calls writer-based prose. What might seem positive to the President and his peers might seem ostentatious and greedy to other audiences who construct the text differently. Certainly, such an effect was not intentional: the President did not seem to be aware that his letter was going to be sent to 500,000 policyholders and the mass media. When asked more than once to name the audiences of the letter, he neglected to mention these audiences.
As reported, the President said that he had his secretary screen the text before he edited it, to identify "anything . . . that doesn't sound like me--is maybe a little irregular or maybe has a negative tone to it. . . ." The President's concern with what he perceived as positiveness was long lived:

I have probably been this way my whole life, that I try to make things sound positive unless there is something negative that you want to bring out. Don't make a negative statement trying to make a positive point.

Other than stating that the letter was "too wordy," the only suggestions the President identified were motivated by his notion of positive emphasis. First, he penciled "negative?" in the top right margin of page 1 of Draft 4, beside the description of companies struggling to recuperate or failing in 1986. In order to "give [the letter] what I thought was more meaning," he penciled arrows directing the Writer to move the discussion of financial accomplishments above the "negative" section to the beginning of the letter (Draft 4, l. 1-5). Note that the President equates positive emphasis with meaning here. This financial discussion was intended to emphasize that in 1986 Auldouest's assets had reached the $400 million mark. Additional arrows indicated that the two short "negative" paragraphs mentioned above were to be joined
into one larger unit (Draft 4, 1.2-3). Since statements can be given great emphasis when set off in paragraphs by themselves (Corbett 124) joining the events into a larger unit would again decrease their emphasis, although the events would still be mentioned. When asked what audience he was thinking about, he said "mostly our peer companies and other business people."

The dominating influence of positive emphasis is evident in the President's motivation for the above suggestions:

I was thinking of putting the positive thing first, and starting it off on a very positive note. That was what I was thinking as much as anything. Not necessarily the audience, but how and what... information would be presented. I guess when I think of things like that, in my own mind I try to think of what kind of frame of mind do I want the reader to be in as they start down through this. I try to present it in a positive frame, and I want them to think that this is going to be something that is positive. Don't start them off on a negative, which is, in my opinion, what they did here. (emphasis added)

Given his editing concerns, it is possible that he deleted a "negative" statement asserting that in 1987
Auldouest's life insurance company would be hurt by the loss of a 20% tax deduction. The President said that he could have dropped a reference in Draft 3 to Auldouest's underwriting losses,

because again that is a negative term as opposed to being a positive term. . . . Don't make a negative statement trying to make a positive point. And to me that's what that [reference to underwriting losses] is doing.

It must be stressed that Auldouest's deletion of this information from its executive letter and report was not illegal. While publicly-owned companies are required to report such losses in their annual reports, Auldouest, a privately owned organization, was not required by the SEC to report such information. Also, the executives did indicate once in the letter that Auldouest had not made a profit in 1986. But that reference could only be understood by people who were familiar with the specialized jargon of the insurance industry.

By eliminating the mention of the amount of underwriting losses and reference to tax losses in the letter, the President would present a more successful image to his commercial clients. But ironically, by catering to his perceived audience at the expense of other actual but unrecognized audiences, his efforts would have the opposite effect on other very important audiences of
the letter. Policyholders and journalists would now
witness a horn-tooting ceremony celebrating unexplained
financial gains, then would be asked for more money and
media support of rate increases and tort reform.
Because the President did not recognize that his
celebration would be viewed by such audiences, his
"positive emphasis" would achieve precisely the opposite
effect for those audiences. When I described the revised
letter to Professor David Mayers, holder of the Shepherd
Chair of Insurance at The Ohio State University, he agreed
that policyholders and journalists who read the letter
would be alienated (telephone interview).

New Brainstorming Session

After the President finished editing Draft 4, the CEO
came to his office to discuss consolidating their ideas.
They had no trouble, according to the CEO's Secretary,
reaching consensus about their approach to the letter, but
they agreed that their revised version, Draft 4, which by
now was covered with editing comments, was unacceptable.
Thus at this point in the process, the contention aligned
the participants as follows:
Picture of Successful Auldoust/Selective Disclosure

CEO
President
CEO's Secretary
President's Secretary

**

Picture of Recovering Auldoust/Disclosure of Losses

Senior Vice President
Vice President
Supervisor
Writer

Figure 3
Alignment of Participants During the Second Major Conflict

It must be stressed that it is unclear whether the President, the CEO's Secretary, or the President's Secretary deleted the statements that disclosed the amount of Auldoust's underwriting losses and its life insurance company's loss of a 20% tax deduction. Nevertheless, when we consider the alignment of participants at the beginning of the letter production process, we note that the President's positive emphasis has now become a dominant force, supplanting the traditional "conservative" approach.
Figure 4
Initial Attitudes Toward the Tone of the Letter

The President met with the Senior Vice President and told him the new positive "concept" of the letter. The President told him the letter was, first, to mention the achievements of the four Auldouest companies. Next, the letter was to discuss 1986 achievements, including the reaching of the $400 million mark in assets. Last, it was to discuss the industry's performance. The President added that the previous draft was too wordy. He gave Draft 4 to the Senior Vice President, to serve only as a point of reference, a point of reference obscured by unidentified editors' numerous "blue pencil" corrections.
On Thursday, December 4, the Senior Vice President discussed "the concept" with the Vice President. It was decided that the Senior Vice President, the Supervisor, and the Writer would each write their own version of the letter. In the discussion, the Senior Vice President and the Vice President produced a very brief "general outline." The Vice President left the meeting with "three items" to address in the following sequence in the letter: "What the results were, accomplishments were, and what are our opportunities." In accord with the President's wishes, the letter was also to be more succinct.

It is important to note that the President's topic "industry performance" changes to the Vice President's "opportunities." Miscommunication due to serial communication causes the modification of the President's intention. The President's positive emphasis is amplified as it travels down the hierarchy, and "negative" details are omitted. The Vice President discussed his perception of the new tone:

[W]e want to write it in a very positive manner. We don't want it in a negative manner. If you look at some of this, it's obviously not positive. . .[the Vice President reads the following as an example] "For some insurance companies, 1986 was a year of crisis that could
not be overcome. More than $X$ amount of insurers were forced into insolvency."

Thus the perceived new tone further stresses the elimination rather than subordination of negative information.

The Vice President communicated the CEO's and President's intentions to the Supervisor and also gave her a copy of Draft 4 with the editing comments. The Supervisor was quite surprised that all three were going to start again from scratch, commenting that this procedure was very unusual. She said that these were her instructions:

They want to hit $400$ million in assets. They want to hit [the four companies]. They wanted achievements and challenges, and they wanted it short and to the point. And then he gave me their copy, their rewrite, but said don't pay any attention to this. Just write from scratch.

The Writer received the same information from the Vice President. In the writing of the letter again "from scratch," the group-writing process becomes completely recursive, moving from the revision phase back to the invention phase.

On Friday, December 5, exactly one month after the first draft of the letter had been written, the Writer and Vice President each finished new versions of the document.
They told me they had not consulted each other while drafting the new versions. These new versions were rejected outright. What happened following the Writer and Supervisor's submission of their drafts to the Senior Vice President is not completely clear, although it is clear that the two new letters were not revised or used in the final version of the letter.

The rejection of these two drafts ended the period of instability during the production process of the executive letter. This phase had been brought about by several powerful forces acting in a centrifugal manner. The numerous audiences of the letter, combined with each participant's different perceived audiences of the letter and many participants' different prioritizing of those audiences caused arguments all the way up the line of the hierarchy. Competing purposes, such as education vs. celebration, linked to participants' different prioritizing of audiences (e.g. domestic vs. commercial policyholders) caused disagreements over the use of the limited space of the letter. Hierarchical clout and miscommunication resulting from the serial communication combined to create conflicts, both when the Supervisor delegated the drafting of the letter to the Writer and also when the Vice President, following protocol, solicited the Senior Vice President's "negative" ideas.
even though the Senior Vice President had not been at the brainstorming meeting with top executives.

Idiosyncratic notions of Standard Edited American English enforced by some editors contributed significantly to the rejection of one draft, and unnecessary "blue penciling" damaged the visual presentation and thus the ethos of another draft. The uncertainty over the values of the new president made it easy initially to adopt the traditional approach to the letter. Yet that the organization's attitudes toward disclosure and positive emphasis in the letter were in flux soon became apparent. Because of the mixed results of the year and because of the lack of clear directions during the brainstorming meeting with executives, the established approach of full disclosure and discussion of the substantial troubles of the industry was followed for at least 42 days and then rejected when "positive" values became predominant. The importance of the letter and its role as a personal, "subjective" statement from the President ensured that the potential conflict over two different views of the year (continued recovery vs. unblemished success) would become an actuality. These powerful centrifugal forces, forces that involved every participant, caused the prolonged period of instability during the process.
Period of "Resolution"

Since the "co-authors," the ranking members of the hierarchy, had rejected the tradition of candor established by the previous letters, their subordinates were forced to follow suit. This elimination of divergent viewpoints led to the third phase of the production process of the letter, a phase dominated by centripetal forces that caused the premature end of the process, despite its length of 77 days.

The Senior Vice President said that rather than using the material generated in the other two new versions of the letter, he "just started from scratch." The Senior Vice President's statement can be verified by the fact that no sentences from the Writer's or the Supervisor's recently generated drafts appear in his original version. It is not surprising that the participant closest to the source of information wrote the successful draft of the letter. While the other two writers received sketchy, faulty instructions, the Senior Vice President's notion of the "concept" was much more concrete. The Senior Vice President emphasized the value of being privy to the President's detailed explanation of "the concept": "I was told that this was a concept that [the President] would like, and from that point on it was simple."

Apparently, before he submitted his version to the President, the Senior Vice President read it aloud to the
CEOs and President's secretaries. The CEO's Secretary said that this procedure was not unusual: "He sort of sounds people out sometimes." The Senior Vice President did not mention this phase of the production of the document, but he did say that he revised his original draft. He then submitted the revised draft to the President and CEO, who made a few minor changes. No one kept these drafts, so it is impossible to tell what these were. They were not considered important by either the Senior Vice President or President, however: "I don't remember once we got to this point of having any major concern about it," the President said in a later interview. On Monday, December 29, seventy-seven days after the group-writing process was begun, the two-page letter was approved.

We can see in comparing the approved draft with Draft 4 that the chief intentions of the President and CEO, as discernible from interview data, are met. To satisfy the President's penchant for positive emphasis, all references to the negative recent past of the industry and to current tax deduction and underwriting losses are dropped. The lead paragraph of the letter exudes self-satisfaction:

We are pleased to present this 1986 annual report. It reflects not only the year's achievements, but also the positive effect from prior years' actions. A result of these
measures is that the combined assets of all Auldouest Companies now exceed [$400 million].

Indicators of the celebrative tone in this paragraph include the words "pleased" and "achievements" and the phrase "positive effect from prior years' actions."

Following this paragraph is a page of financial statistics—the first page of the two-page letter is now a financial report. Normally, the letter is a document written for a lay audience. However, the financial information is not presented in lay language. In particular, the one-word definition of surplus, "equity," would not help most domestic policyholders. Clearly, this financial section is of the ilk criticized by Duff & Phelps, Inc., financial analysts, who state that management too often repeats financial statement numbers in the written text of the annual report without explaining their significance ("Annual Reports That Fail," 73). While the numbers and terminology would be largely confusing to a lay audience, the verbs and nouns used to describe the activities, including "grew," "increased," "exceed," "[loss/expense ratio] decreased," "improvement," "increase," advance the celebrative tone and successful image. The statistics added for the CEO serve to concretely reinforce the "successful" rhetorical tone set by the President.
Conspicuously absent from the financial details are the company's multi-million-dollar underwriting losses. That the company lost money for the year would be evident only to someone with enough expertise to interpret this statement: "The combined loss and expense ratio decreased from 1985's 109.6 to 103.2." Indeed, when I asked Professor Frank Gibson, Chairman of the Finance Department of The Ohio State University, for a definition of a "loss and expense ratio," he said that he did not feel qualified to explain the term and referred me to professors who taught insurance.

The "authors" go on to spotlight improvements in operations that "will have both immediate and long-term positive effects" including "greater efficiencies and even a greater degree of professionalism." Although the letter next discusses the potential threats of liability settlements and new taxes, it ends "positively": come what may, Auldouest "will continue to grow and prosper." But while the determination to prosper no matter what may seem impressive to other industry executives, it would not be so praiseworthy to policyholders experiencing rate increases or journalists questioning high surpluses.

Because the production of the two-page letter took 77 days and because the letter risked losing the goodwill of journalists and half a million domestic policyholders, it cannot be considered a success.
During the process, subordinates had made important suggestions that would have improved the end product, including explaining statistics and candidly stating underwriting and tax problems, problems that very probably would have made policyholders more open to rate increases. But subordinates were not in a position to contest the approved document. Thus the hierarchical nature of the company acted centripetally to impel the premature end of the production process, eliminating divergent viewpoints that could have improved the quality of the letter considerably. Other forces that expedited the cooperation necessary to end the process included time constraints and the deep-seated "get-along" attitude of the top executives.

In order to win the approval of a letter that was long overdue, the Senior Vice President inadvertently risked alienating half a million policyholders and some journalists. However, because he gave top management what it wanted, he gained favorable visibility. As the President told me some time after the approval of the letter, "[the Senior Vice President] is pretty good at knowing pretty much what [the CEO] and I think and being able to put the thoughts together." Regarding the Department of Corporate Communications, the President said "I'm new on this job, so Corporate Communications is trying to prepare something that is me, and it is
difficult for them to do that. I realize that. But as time goes on that perhaps will get a little bit better."

When we consider the final alignment of participants as the result of the approval of the Senior Vice President's draft and the rejection of the Supervisor and Writer's drafts, we see the following:
Figure 5
Alignment of Participants at the Conclusion of the Process
(Participants on floors listed in order of rank)
One may notice that the grouping of the "successful" faction and the "unsuccessful" faction reflects the office locations of participants. But there is an important difference. The new president had now put his "stamp" of positive emphasis on the letter, demonstrating his authority within the organization.

In the successful campaign to present a unified, flattering picture of the company, the President's "decrowning," initially centrifugal positive emphasis in the end centripetally approaches what M.M. Bakhtin calls a "unitary language": not "a system of abstract grammatical categories," but rather "a world view, . . . a concrete opinion." "Thus," as Bakhtin concludes, a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization.

(271)

While positive emphasis was quite a powerful convertible force that had great impact on the process and end product, it must be stressed that this force was not imparted solely by one person. Further, it is clear that no individual was singularly responsible for either the inordinate 78-day production process of the two-page letter or for the flawed final product. And one would be
remiss to castigate the group as particularly unskilled: Because of the terrific challenges that the ghostwriting of a "co-authored" letter written for a composite audience poses, the production process is known across industry as a very time-consuming, "frustrating, tear-jerking process." The causes of this difficulty, however, have not previously been identified in depth. In our case, centripetal and centrifugal forces, forces inherent in the language context, interacted through participants in the manner described to create the end results. In the next chapter I will provide a fuller description and analysis of these forces.
Notes

1. I am indebted to James Phelan for the notion of the distinction between the dimensions and the functions of an agent.
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CHAPTER IV
CAUSES OF THE FLAWED GROUP-WRITING PROCESS

In order to understand why the group writing of this executive letter was not more successful, we must understand the socially rooted forces that interacted during the writing process to produce the end result. Centrifugal forces within the writing context, by separating group members, prolonged the production process, and centripetal forces, by eliminating divergent viewpoints, caused a partially ineffectual final written product. Some forces, convertible forces, acted centrifugally during one phase of the group-writing process and centripetally during another phase. This chapter will examine each of these socially rooted forces.

Centripetal Forces

There were only two forces constantly encouraging agreement. The lack of consistently centripetal forces was an important reason, of course, that the creation of the two-page letter took 77 days. In order to dominate,
as these forces did at the initiation and conclusion of the production process, centripetal forces had to be assisted by convertible forces.

"Get-Along Attitude"

The top managers of Auldouest were reportedly on very friendly terms with each other, to the point of taking their family vacations together. This closeness along with the proximity of offices and partial isolation from the rest of the employees encouraged a "get-along" attitude among the executives. Such an attitude of cooperativeness that often discourages conflict is widespread in business. In the Department of Corporate Communication, this attitude was also evident, particularly in the Supervisor's suppressing some of her misgivings regarding the Writer's first draft of the letter and in the Vice President's getting a "second opinion" on this draft.

Time Constraints

An impetus toward agreement that increased as the editing process continued was the time pressure on the writers and editors. As a priority item, the executive letter disrupted the work schedule of lower-level writers and editors who had to put other urgent projects aside to devote themselves to the letter. Corporate communicators
were expected to be "instantly responsive," one employee said. Another employee was happy when the letter was being examined by other editors because when the letter came back, there was no choice but to "do it now."

Indeed, the chief purpose that an employee mentioned for the letter was to "g[e]t it off my desk."

The letter not only interrupted the work flow but also cost the company a considerable amount of money as salaried employees spent more and more time wrestling with its prose. The letter went through 27 planning, drafting, editing, or revising sessions; at least seven sessions involved board members of the company. Since "time is money," especially regarding the efforts of such high-salaried individuals, the growing expense of the project increasingly encouraged the writers and editors to reach an agreement and conclude the process.

**Convertible Forces**

The following forces encouraged agreement during one phase of document production and disagreement during another, converting from a unifying to a fragmenting element or vice versa depending upon the situation.

**Hierarchical Distribution of Power**

As mentioned, not all floors of the Auldouest Mutual Insurance Companies Headquarters are occupied by its
employees. While the first ten floors house nearly 800 Auldouest employees, the middle 22 floors of the 33-story building are rented to other companies. The uppermost floor of the building, however, is occupied by Auldouest's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), other top managers, legal counsel, and their secretaries (see Figure 6).
AULDOEAST BUILDING

33rd Floor: CEO, Pres, SVP, CEO's Sec, Pres' Sec

**********Offices Rented by Other Companies**********
**(Floors 11-32)**

**********Other Employee Offices**********
**(Floors 1-10)**

3rd Floor: VP, Supervisor, Writer

Figure 6
Office Locations of Participants (one space = one floor)
(Participants on floors listed in order of rank)
This building, with its relatively huge gap between the executives and the low-ranking initial ghostwriter of the executive letter, stands as a concrete-and-steel metaphor for the communication problems that occurred during the letter-production process. The physical differentiation of levels of the organization shows the emphasis upon hierarchy at Auldouest. As is often the case in business, military metaphors were used to describe the leadership of the organization: the CEO was a "four-star general," the president a "three-star general."

Although there could be discussion beforehand, after a decision had been made, it was necessary for lower-ranking employees to fall into line. "It's either buy in or get out," as one employee said.

The organizational hierarchy was indicated both by the office locations of top management and also by other office locations and furnishings. In the Department of Corporate Communication, for example, the Vice President occupied a corner office with a very wide wooden desk and chair, four other expensive chairs, tastefully framed prints, globe, bookcase, credenza, and antique gumball machine—a whimsical testimony to the power of its displayer.

The no-nonsense furnishings of the seven other departmental offices contrasted markedly with those of their superior. The Supervisor's office was equipped with
a metal desk and plastic chair, two other plastic chairs, file cabinet, work table, and a computer terminal. The Writer's office was narrower and furnished with one less chair.

Five-foot-tall metal walls defined the other offices in the department. The hard, worn carpet led into similarly structured departments on the third floor, where employees were in constant activity, in one case behind a floor-to-ceiling glass wall. Office noise bounced back and forth off the institutional beige metal dividers, a five-foot-high maze demarking narrow borders and scant privacy.

Sinking into the carpet of the reception room of the executive offices after a 30-floor elevator ascent presented no small contrast. Striding past oil paintings, one was greeted by a receptionist in a long dress. Executive secretaries worked in cubicles with eight-foot-tall wooden walls, walls that ended several feet below the high ceiling. A polished mahogany dining-table with silver candelabra was in an adjoining wardroom, floor-to-ceiling windows commanding a multi-mile view across the city and surrounding farmlands to the horizon.

This emphasis upon hierarchy is a typical facet of insurance company cultures, according to Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy. These cultures
pay inordinate attention to titles and formalities. Their tightly structured hierarchies come very close to a class system. At a major insurance company, for instance, the hierarchy runs from "Class 19" for those with a high-school diploma, all the way up to "Class 49" for the highest vice-presidential level. (121)

One manager working for this company states that rank is so prestigious that employees prefer level promotions over salary increases (122). Those promotions bring forth trappings similar to the status furniture at Auldouest:

Classes 17-25 have steel desks and one chair with no arms, [while] . . . classes 30-34's desks are known as 'aircraft carriers' or 'flat-tops,' so much larger are they, and--hallelujah--they come complete with armchairs (two). (122)

A significant indication of the emphasis upon rank at Auldouest was a powerful tradition of military protocol--one normally followed the chain of command in activities involving others, and employees occupying low and high levels of the organization did not often interact. This protocol had shaped the production process of the executive letter until very recently. Before the end of 1985, writers in the Department of Corporate
Communications who ghostwrote the executive letter did not meet with top management to plan the letter. Only the Vice President met with "top brass," and the writers had to draft the letter based upon the Vice President's impressions of the executives' intentions for the letter. However, at the end of 1985, the Department convinced top management that documents would be produced much more efficiently if the "author" could speak to the ghost-writer.

While top management had now given ghost-writers permission to attend the planning session of the letter, the conspicuous emphasis upon rank and general policy of following the command chain created an atmosphere in which one was likely to agree with one's superior. Thus the emphasis upon hierarchy served, at least in part, as a powerful centripetal force. In such a milieu, "peer editing" would most likely take place among employees at the same level of the company. As the Senior Vice President said, unless the editing suggestion he gave a subordinate was shown to be clearly erroneous, the suggestion had to be followed: "it [wa]s not [a matter of] negotiation."

Nevertheless, the hierarchical orientation of the company also meant that the letter had to be approved at every link in the chain of command. Some intermediaries, because they did not participate in the planning session
with executives or for other reasons, included information or made changes that created more conflict and were later rejected. Thus the emphasis upon hierarchy acted centrifugally as well as centripetally during the process.

Organizational Conventions of the Letter

The conventions of the Auldouest executive letter followed initially by writers and editors were the conventions established either by or with the cooperation of the CEO, who had been either a "co-author" or an "author" of the letter since the inception of Auldouest's annual report in 1980. Based upon previous letters and upon directions given in the letter-planning meeting with the "authors," writers and editors believed that the CEO wanted to include several elements. Four of these features particularly served as points of agreement and disagreement during certain phases of the group-writing process: the use of many financial statistics, the frank disclosure of underwriting losses, the discussion of the industry at large, and the presentation of the letter in a tone of restraint.

The most widespread belief about the CEO's editorial preferences was that he liked plenty of statistics and other numbers in the text, as one employee's description of a planning meeting illustrates:
He said "Statistics, statistics." . . . [The last document produced for him] was crammed with statistics. Right down to the last dollar. He liked that.

The employee said that his concern for numbers was due to the CEO's many years spent as an accountant and Vice President of the Accounting Division. The CEO's emphasis upon figures is evident in the 1985 executive letter, signed only by the CEO, which stated after an introductory paragraph that

[Auldouest] Mutual's surplus rose $7,591,441 or 13.5 percent over the 1984 figure. Assets were up over $10,000,000, finishing at $290,578,279. The underwriting loss was $18,896,203 and the combined loss and expense ratio was 109.6, down from 114.8 at year-end in 1984.

Here we have million-dollar figures reported "down to the last dollar," even though such a level of detail is unnecessary and difficult to process. Along with including statistics in the text, disclosing the year's underwriting loss was not contested during the initial phase of the production process. Unlike reports that only disclose "net income" figures that often hide the performance of the core business of the company, the Auldouest executive letter of the annual report had
indicated its underwriting losses every year of its existence (See Table 2).

Table 2
Disclosure of Underwriting Losses in Auldouest Executive Letters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>As a result of inflation and a series of summer storms, our experience did not measure up to our expectations and we suffered an operating loss for the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>The year's underwriting experience produced a loss...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>These elements, coupled with increased loss frequency and severity, produced record underwriting losses for the industry and for [The Auldouest] Mutual Insurance Company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Even with improving economic conditions, [Auldouest] Mutual, as well as the casualty/property insurance industry, was once again hit with unfavorable underwriting results, a condition that has prevailed since the early 80's.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Actually, the industry paid out in claims and operational costs 18 percent more than the amount of insurance premiums received. Our (the industry and [Auldouest]'s) task is to identify the reasons for such adversity and, where possible, to develop solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>The underwriting loss was $18,896,203...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another convention evident in the 1982-84 disclosures in Table 2 was to present Auldouest's results within the context of the performance of the insurance industry at
large. In the company's early annual reports, the CEO's letter repeated information about various departments of the company, information that was already in the rest of the annual report. So in order to avoid this redundancy, the Department of Communications had convinced the CEO to take a broader perspective.

As is evident from the 1982-84 disclosure statements, discussing Auldouest's performance in the larger context of the insurance industry's performance also softened the impact of the announcement of underwriting losses. Since the industry had "experienced only three years of profitable underwriting results" from 1973-84, as the 1984 executive letter announced, Auldouest's unprofitable underwriting results could at least be presented as not unusual. Because Auldouest had again sustained operating losses in fiscal 1986, presenting those losses in the context of another difficult year for the industry made rhetorical sense and was a strategy that most participants initially agreed upon.

A related convention of the letter established by the CEO over the previous years was a measured tone. One employee described the CEO's attitude toward the company's performance as "conservative":

If you ask [the CEO] "How are things going," he'll say "Well, ... we've gone from ... grave... [to] ... stable, but we are still
in intensive care,"... rather than being so positive--any day you'll be out of the hospital.

A glance at the first sentences of the 1985 and 1984 executive letters, each signed only by the CEO (who during those years was both president and CEO), illustrates his "conservative" bent:

1985

[Auldouest's] operating results showed considerable improvement in 1985. This improvement was due primarily to many difficult actions: withdrawing from the state of [Illinois], initiating necessary rate increases, establishing stronger underwriting guides and making staff reductions where indicated.

1984

The report this year depicts a year of frustration and yet shows significant accomplishments. We feel comfortable that steps have been taken, operations improved, new programs implemented that will enable [Auldouest] to continue its historically high level of service to the public.
It is well documented that the property and casualty insurance industry has been in a depressed profit condition for a number of years.

To be sure, the CEO's emphasis upon difficulties is due considerably to Auldouest's performances during those years. Nevertheless, in 1985 Auldouest's assets increased by $10 million; its surplus grew 13.5%, and, an added sign of improvement, its loss/expense ratio decreased from 114.8 (in 1984) to 109.6, well below the industry average of 118. These gains could have been given the greatest emphasis had the CEO desired to subordinate and "bury" the negative details (the withdrawal from one state, etc.) in the middle of the text. The letter could have remained candid, but its emphasis could have been more focused upon the company's genuine achievements.

These established conventions of Auldouest's executive letter reduced conflict at the beginning of the writing process but caused conflict later when they met with powerful opposition.

**Positive Emphasis**

Positive emphasis, another convertible force, gained its strength from three sources: its widespread
acceptance as a goal of business communication, its widespread use in executive letters of annual reports, and its constant use by the new President of Auldouest Mutual Insurance Companies.

In their influential business communication text, C.W. Wilkinson, Dorothy Wilkinson, and Gretchen Vik explain the goal of the positive emphasis:

*it is stressing what something is rather than what it is not, emphasizing what the firm or product can do rather than what it cannot do, leading with action rather than apology or explanation, and avoiding words that convey basically unpleasant ideas.* (authors' emphasis) (132)

The authors assert that "test after test" has proven "the wisdom of positive statement" because communicators get better results with positive statements than with negative ones (132). As the authors conclude, "the effective way is through accentuating the positive, eliminating the negative where possible, and otherwise subordinating it (authors' emphasis)" (133). The positive approach is advised in all business-writing texts. Such an approach is also typically employed in sales seminars and has been widely encouraged in business and elsewhere by the popular writings of "positive thinkers" such as Norman Vincent Peale.
A positive tone is also a generic trait of the executive letter of the annual report, a tone Roger Miller, Fred Power, and Richard Meyer describe as "inevitably optimistic" (149). In his analysis of the annual reports of exemplary companies described in In Search of Excellence, John Stegman found that superlatives were present seven times as often as "diminishing words," constituting 6.1% of the words of the letters (80). Most of the eight participants in the production of Auldouest's executive letter indicated that a positive emphasis was very important in the letter. None of the participants told me that such an emphasis was not important. The Writer said that the letter should be "short [and] sweet"; the Supervisor said that the letter was intended to "present a positive image to its audience"; the Vice President said that the objective of the letter was "to present the most positive document that we could present to people"; the Senior Vice President said that as a "sales tool," the letter was to project "the strength and viability of the company"; the CEO's Secretary said that the letter was intended to "put our best foot forward"; the President said that through the letter one tries to "project as positive a picture of your company as you can." And while the CEO could not be interviewed, the opening sentences of his two previous executive letters
show that although presenting a balanced picture, he was concerned with clearly presenting the company's strengths:

1984

The report that follows depicts a year of frustration and yet shows significant accomplishments.

1985

[Auldouest]'s operating results showed considerable improvement in 1985.

The participant who manifested the strongest commitment to a positive emphasis was the new president of the organization. Indeed, this emphasis was an integral facet of his written persona: The President said that he typically had his secretary screen his text before he edited it, to identify "anything . . . that doesn't sound like me--is maybe a little irregular or maybe has a negative tone to it . . . ." The President said that his putting things positively had been a life-long endeavor. He did mention negative concerns if, for some reason, he wished to present something negatively, but he said he did not state "negatives" in a long-term strategy to make a positive point. The intensity of his commitment to a positive image was revealed when I asked the President
about audience interests. Instead of responding immediately to the question and discussing what he felt his audience wanted from a particular text, he first described the positive image he intended to project to his readers.

While it would appear that the participants agreed that a positive emphasis was a key element of the letter, conflicts arose over the degree of positive emphasis—whether to subordinate negative details or eliminate them altogether. While the CEO's tone of restraint dominated the first half of the production process, the President's positive emphasis ultimately "set the tone" of the letter. Since all important participants were familiar with the business and executive-letter convention of positive emphasis, once the degree of positive emphasis had been suggested, participants collaborated in removing "negatives." So while the unabatedly positive outlook served initially as a centering force sparking conflict, in the end, because this outlook was condoned by the highest-ranking participant, the CEO, positive emphasis served to unify the participants' editorial positions as the letter was recast.

Not Enough Clear Direction Given

Initially, the lack of clear direction obscured conflicting attitudes about disclosure and other
"negatives." After the document had been completed, four of the six who worked on the letter for the "authors" felt that a major cause for the inordinate length of the production process was that the ghostwriters had not been given enough clear direction by the "authors" at the outset and afterwards. One editor said that we got a feel as to what we should say as far as the subject matter, but in terms of actual detail, we weren't given anything . . . . Trying to get more information up front is sometimes pretty frustrating. Because you sometimes get the impression that they haven't really formed it in their minds.

The frustrating generality of the suggestions of the Auldouest executives is not surprising when one considers this conclusion of communication theorist W.C. Redding: "The higher one goes in the hierarchy, the more must decisions be based upon less and less detailed information of the 'life facts'."¹ The executives may not have been exposed to the information necessary to provide helpful specifics.

One editor said that the thesis and outline for the letter should have been written in the planning meeting with the President and CEO so that the ghostwriters would have had a clearer direction. Participants remarked about the lack of clear direction not only in the planning phase
but in the revision of the various drafts of the document. Revealing again the influence of hierarchy on the group-writing process, one editor said that the more powerful the editor, the more the possibility of vague advice. Only a high-ranking editor could say to a writer "I don't know what I don't like, but change it anyway." If it were someone, my peer, coming up to me and saying "I don't know what I don't like about this, I just don't like it," I'd say, "Fine, I guess we'll go with it as it is." You can't really do that, however, if somebody's higher level. While the lack of clear direction initially obscured latent centrifugal forces, these undetected forces grew to dominating strength by the end of the period of stability. Clearly, a cause of conflict and prolongment of the group-writing process was that in this rigidly hierarchical organization the high-ranking executives had possessed and exercised the power to be vague. As Bonnye Miller points out, such vagueness is a typical problem in the production of executive letters (3).

Centrifugal Forces

Thirteen decentralizing forces contributed to the conflict which prolonged the production of the letter
inordinately, delaying the production of the annual report for two months.

Serial Communication

In Organizational Communication, a text that Diana C. Reep, reviewer for The Journal of Business Communication, says "can justifiably be called a classic" (61), Gerald M. Goldhaber states that "as the number of links in a human message transmission system increases, so also does the probability for error, distortion, and omission increase." Specifically, "[d]etails are omitted . . . , added . . . , highlighted . . ., or modified . . . to conform to the interests, needs, and feelings of the reproducer" (24).

Because Auldowest emphasized hierarchy and had many rungs on its organizational chart, serial communication was an organizational fact of life. Important documents which were to be seen by the top executives of the corporation frequently required review at every intermediate level. Employees expected to have the draft they approved reviewed by superiors: when asked why he expected the letter to go from his department to the Senior Vice President before reaching the top executives, the Vice President responded "natural chain of command." The Supervisor said that important documents such as the letter were typically given to the Senior Vice President because the latter was responsible for the Department of
Corporate Communication and needed to be able to answer any questions his superiors had about the document.

In the case of the executive letter, protocol dictated that the Writer's draft had to be edited by five individuals before it reached the "co-authors" of the letter. Counting the Writer and "authors," then, the communication chain had eight links (see Figure 7). As Goldhaber's assertion would predict, much miscommunication occurred. This miscommunication frequently caused disagreement as the successive editors' expectations were not met.

CEO
CEO's Secretary
President
President's Secretary
Senior Vice President
Vice President
Supervisor
Writer

Figure 7
The Approval Route of the Executive Letter

Details were frequently omitted in the transmission of editing advice from sender to receiver. In one case,
37 percent of a high-ranking editor's directions were not followed by a participant in the letter-writing process who had received this advice through another editor. Over sixteen percent of another editor's directions were overlooked in this same incident. The Senior Vice President and the Vice President stated that the instructions that they gave were to be followed: "it is not a matter of negotiation," the Senior Vice President said. So the total cost of adding this serial communication was that out of 37 directions, 10, over a fourth (27%), were lost.

The elimination of parts of the message did not cause those parts to be lost in every instance. But the only reason that the parts eliminated in the serial transmission of the message were not lost is that when the drafts were returned to them, editors did not approve the drafts and repeated the directions. Of course, this new cycle of revision and review caused more delay.

While miscommunication also occasionally occurred when one participant made suggestions directly to another who incorporated them in a text, there were not nearly as many omissions. In the first editing session, for example, all 19 of the suggestions the Supervisor gave the Writer were implemented. Moreover, the major breakthrough in the deadlock over the approval of the letter came when at least one "author" (the President) and one ghostwriter
(the Senior Vice President) communicated directly. The Senior Vice President later said that after the President had defined the concept of the letter to him, writing the approved draft "was simple."

The addition during serial communication of details not originally in the message also contributed to disagreement and to the rejection of various drafts of the letter. In one instance, an editor made a suggestion to a subordinate, attributing the suggestion to the Senior Vice President. The Senior Vice President, however, had not given this directive. Significantly, the editor who distorted the directive told the subordinate to eliminate all references to the media. This suggestion contributed to a change in the letter's implied audience, resulting ultimately in the letter's ignoring the media, an important audience. Indeed, after the end of the letter-writing process, the Senior Vice President, who had drafted the approved version of the letter, denied that the letter was sent to the media.

A more extensive addition of material not requested by the "authors" in their planning session with two editors from the Department of Corporate Communication occurred when a high-ranking editor who had not attended the planning session was asked to review the letter. The editor directed his subordinates to add much "negative" material to help prepare policyholders for rate increases.
Ironically, the "negatives" this editor had his subordinates add were all rejected later by the President. The high-ranking editor, in addition, wanted some text to come before the numbers at the beginning of the letter, reasoning that otherwise the opening "wasn't very warm." Yet the CEO had said that numbers were to be emphasized first. The high-ranking editor's extreme revision of the introduction of the draft probably destroyed its chance of approval.

A significant example of deletion and addition of message also occurred during serial communication. After a draft of the letter had been rejected, one of the top executives told a high-ranking editor that the letter was to address, among other things, the industry's performance. By the time those directions reached the Writer, however, the directions had been changed to mention, instead of the industry's performance, "our opportunities." Here the "negative" industry performance topic is deleted and the optimistic "opportunities" topic substituted. Thus the positive emphasis was amplified as it traveled down the hierarchy.

One lower-ranking participant summarized the problems caused by serial communication:

If we can't get a sense or a feel from them personally [of] what it is they want—if it goes to [intermediary editors] and then to me it does
make it more difficult, especially when you have something that is going to have someone's name on it, that they are going to take some personal ownership over.

Delegating

One of the most important causes of the delay in the approval of the executive letter was the delegating of the letter down several rungs of the organizational ladder in this rigidly hierarchical corporation, creating a serial chain of communication between "authors" and ghost-writers. The delegating of writing was a facet of corporate culture, according to one participant:

They'll have you write something and then they'll edit it. But as far as actually formulating the thing from start to finish, they really don't want to be involved in that. It's like part of their job—and as you move up the ladder in the corporation it becomes more and more true—people give you ideas. They bombard you with ideas, and you say yes or no. You make your decision based upon your general knowledge of the corporation.

Yet every time writing was delegated by top management, the chain of serial communication grew to at least three—
the "author," the ghostwriter, and the editor (the "author's" secretary).

**Importance of Document**

The letter was considered important by the Vice President because, as he told me, "if there's two things that are probably read in an annual report, by business people, it's the executive summary and the financial reports." The letter was also important to most participants because of the depth of involvement of the executives who had the power to promote, denote, or fire them. As one editor said, "You will see some egos there. You will learn a lot about your chief executives very quickly." The executives were especially concerned about the letter because, as another editor said, "their images are out there on the line." Because of the letter's importance and visibility, participants had very high expectations of the document.

**Subjectivity**

In comparison to a factual report, the letter was considered to be a subjective document, "totally subjective," as one editor explained. The writer of the executive letter has to "climb into somebody else's brain and write just the way they want [it] written." The ghostwriter's challenge was compounded because the letter was to be a unified statement of "co-authors."
Idiosyncratic Notions of Standard English

Another disrupting force was the sometimes strange conception of Standard Edited American English enforced by some editors. A significant number of "corrections" penciled on the submitted drafts, such as pointless substitutions of synonyms and syntactically damaging changes such as adding misplaced modifiers, not only wasted time but also damaged the appearance, the ethos, of the drafts before they reached their approvers. In one instance, five (18.5%) of an editor's proofreading changes were unnecessary. For example, she substituted "halt" for "stop" because she believed that "to stop" meant "to halt only temporarily."

Mixed Results in Fiscal 1986

While in previous years, as one employee in an early brainstorming session indicated, communicators were forced to focus upon one positive aspect of the corporation because everything else was negative, in 1986 the economic condition of Auldouest had improved a great deal. But different editors and writers saw the year in different ways, and these different perceptions created conflict. While many accomplishments could be spotlighted, fiscal
1986 for Auldouest embodied both good news and bad news. The most important good financial news was that Auldouest's net assets exceeded $400 million for the first time.

But while Auldouest and most of the major players in the industry were recuperating, it is important to understand the severity of the crisis in the insurance industry, in part caused by rising auto and health care costs, the fall of the prime interest rate, unhealthy corporate expansion fueled by companies making insurance easily available to bad risks, and price wars. As Time magazine reported in 1986, between early 1984 and early 1986, forty liability insurers became insolvent (Church 25). At the time of the genesis of the executive letter, in late 1986, a substantial number of additional insurers were expected to go bankrupt soon. This expectation was also voiced later by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, who told a Congressional panel in July, 1987, that 24.1 per cent of the 2,127 property-casualty companies whose 1986 financial records it examined needed immediate regulatory attention or were scheduled for attention in the future (Columbus Dispatch 7/13/87, B1).

During the early stage of this crisis, Auldouest had had its Best's rating for its automobile liability insurance company lowered from "A" to "B." This ranking is an independently measured rating of financial strength
published by the A.M. Best Company in their annual review of the insurance industry. In order to regain or surpass its former outstanding rating, Auldouest needed to increase its surplus account, a "safety valve" financial reserve which pays large claims that premium income cannot cover. Only through surplus, for example, could companies pay the $167 million of insured losses caused by tornados in Xenia, Ohio in April, 1974. In 1986, Auldouest, by pumping income into its surplus account, made substantial progress toward regaining its excellent equity rating. The auto liability insurance company's Best's rating increased to "B+," a significant improvement that at least one editor felt should be announced in the letter.

The most important bad news for the corporation was that, as was the case since it began issuing its annual report, Auldouest did not earn an operating profit for the year, instead suffering underwriting losses. Underwriting losses occur when an insurance company's premium income for the year is less than its operating expenses, including commissions to agents, claims paid, monies reserved for pending claims, and premium tax. While Auldouest's underwriting losses declined in 1986, the company still lost money, as one employee affirmed:

We only lost--think about it--we only lost five million dollars this year. And for most people that would be a catastrophe. For us it is very
good compared with—'it's kind of like if you are bleeding to death or if you have a broken arm. I'll take the broken arm, right?' (employee's emphasis)

It must be noted, however, that underwriting losses are not the only, or in many cases even the key indicator of a company's financial health. Industry losses and profits occur in cycles, and in any given year, the majority of companies either experience underwriting profits or the majority of companies experience losses. Nevertheless, from 1973-1983, the insurance industry showed only three years of operating profits. Certainly, 1987 was expected to be a year of profits for most companies, great profits for major companies, according to one editor. But 1986 was considered by industry observers to be a "swing" year, with most companies showing reduced underwriting losses, including Auldouest. And profits for Auldouest were not "just around the corner." The company's 1987 Planning Document set the goal of returning to profitability in two fiscal years: "Our long-range goal is to achieve an operating profit in every state and a company-wide combined ratio of less than 100 by December 31, 1988" (4).

These mixed results permitted significantly different interpretations of Auldouest's condition. One editor saw Auldouest as only slowly emerging from its financial
crisis, comparing the company with another company in the same condition:

Last night [an acquaintance not employed by Auldouest] . . . quoted . . . the chairman of the board of Guyco Insurance as saying 'Our previous results were awful. Our current results are mediocre' . . . from the standpoint of where the industry has been before, in the financial health area. It is a lot better than it was, but we are still not anywhere near where we want to be.

Another editor directed the Writer to drop the announcement of the Best's Rating upgrading to B+, saying that the rating was "not even close to where we want to be, . . . almost a negative thing." Yet another influential editor felt that the company's accomplishments—the increase in net assets, surplus, and decreasing underwriting losses—indicated a year of great success. At Auldouest, the mixed results of the "swing year" provided some data for conflicting claims, especially when some participants' practices were to "eliminate the negative." Thus Auldouest's mixed results served as a centrifugal force.
Several Audiences

Not counting participants in the group-writing process, 15 different audiences read the letter: top managers of selected other insurance companies, staff members of other insurance companies, bankers, the chamber of commerce, the media, company representatives with clients, potential commercial policyholders, commercial policyholders, potential domestic policyholders, and half a million domestic policyholders, potential agents, agents, potential employees, employees who asked for the report, and families and friends of the top executives. As will become clear, these audiences were not the only important audiences of the letter. The seven editors of the letter were also important audiences, particularly the "authors" of the "subjective" communiqué. All told, then, the letter was read by 22 audiences. And meeting the needs of specific audiences was the reason given for over 25% of the changes made, while consideration of audience was a less proximate cause of many other changes. Just trying to address in some fashion the great number of different audiences of the letter created substantial conflicts between writers and editors.

Competing Purposes

There were several purposes of the document. While many of these purposes did not create conflict, other
purposes clashed and/or competed for the limited space available for the letter.

One major purpose of the letter was to attain recognition from other companies in the insurance industry. As the Vice President mentioned in explaining why the support of charities was mentioned in the letter, Number one, you are human beings. . . . You want to put something back into the community. But any astute public relations person will tell you very quickly that they also want to be recognized by their peer group in that strata where they operate—"Hey, I'm [Andy Hamilton] with [Auldouest] Insurance Company, and we did as much as [other insurance companies in town] in supporting the community . . . ."

Sending out such documents was a tradition—"everybody else does it," said another high-ranking editor, who believed that peer recognition was the most important purpose of the letter. He did not know why this practice occurred, but it was important. Indeed, the top management of other insurance companies was the first audience and the most frequently mentioned audience of one of the two "authors" of the letter.

Another purpose supporting a positive emphasis was that the letter and report were to function as a "sales tool." They would be given to commercial policyholders,
potential commercial policyholders, potential employees, agents, potential agents, and other audiences that would be interested in a successful, equitable, growing company. Since the corporation had increased its commercial business by 50% in the last year, an accomplishment the President believed was particularly important (Planning Document 2), commercial policyholders were a high-priority audience, and looking successful to them was an important goal of Auldouest's top management.

Another purpose of the letter, a standard purpose for the document, was to recount the most important events of the year. Authorities including Richard Lewis state that there is an ethical imperative to discuss not only good news but also bad news "in a candid, straightforward manner" (20). Since Auldouest had sustained underwriting losses for the year, the company's tradition of mentioning underwriting losses and other "negatives" was considered by some high-ranking participants to be at odds with the first two purposes.

The education of policyholders and the media was another purpose that competed for space in the letter. One challenge was to define surplus briefly and to show its direct relationship to the affordability and availability of insurance. The explanation had to be written in lay language. As one editor said, "think of a person sitting there and become[ing] an economist, a
mathematician and a business manager all in one forty-seven-line reading. That is not going to happen." So instead of using technical shorthand, the editor believed the best way to explain the importance of surplus was to use "a good comparison, something that somebody can get their teeth into immediately." Because of the lineage that was perceived to be necessary for such an explanation, conflicts over whether or not to include this information arose.

The letter was also initially intended to "educate" audiences about Auldouest's charitable contributions. One editor gave this explanation of this purpose:

For many, many years corporations in this country quietly did all this [supported charities]. But if you will notice, any more corporations are suddenly standing up and saying, "My God, that is a resource of billions of dollars that we are pouring back out into the community." . . . They kept quiet until about ten years ago. The average American out here had no idea what corporations were doing. All they knew about corporations was that it was big business and it was bad. And unions capitalized on that for how many years? . . . We are putting all this stuff out here, and we need to
be recognized for it. And one way that you do that is via your annual reports . . .

Certainly, identifying such contributions to the community would in many cases call attention to actions that might otherwise not be known. But this kind of "educating" was not completely for the sake of providing all the important information concerning the charitable contributions of the company. The Vice President did not suggest balancing the above information with the tax write-offs gained from such contributions. Companies can generally deduct charitable contributions of up to 10% of their annual gross income, and any amount that overruns that percentage may be at least partially written off over several subsequent years. While companies often make charitable contributions chiefly out of the desire to be good corporate citizens, tax write-offs are still a consideration in such decisions.

An important function of the executive letter is to persuasively represent the company's interests in discussions of legislation and elections. As Richard Lewis says, the letter can "serve as a statement of position." Participants in the production of the Auldouest executive letter believed that policyholders needed to be "informed" about legislation that would affect the corporation's interests. The chief issue that top management wanted to address was the reform of tort
law. Auldouest believed that the current laws governing liability settlements were too lenient, permitting policyholders to receive excessive settlements that threatened to bankrupt insurance companies. Even as the letter was being written, legislators in a key state were deliberating whether or not to reform liability laws. In order to emphasize the damage being done by existing liability laws, a "negative" description of companies going bankrupt and of other companies struggling to survive was advised by a middle manager. But this description cast a pall over the bright picture that the President preferred.

Other legislation that top management wanted to spotlight was the federal government's 1986 Tax Reform Act. This reform would cause Auldouest to lose a 20% deduction for its life insurance company and was expected to cost the property-casualty insurance industry $7 billion over the next five years. How much of this "negative" information to reveal or emphasize became another point of contention.

Yet another purpose of the letter was to prepare policyholders for rate increases. Top management believed that Auldouest's Auto Insurance was underpriced, and the managers had decided to increase rates. This decision could have been supported in the letter by the fact that the auto-insurance company had sustained a significant
underwriting loss in 1986. The problem that increasing financial health posed to corporate communicators was that the media and domestic policyholders might object to auto-insurance rate-increases, since the income of Auldouest had increased dramatically. These audiences were not anticipated to be sympathetic for very long, if at all, because, as one editor said in an early brainstorming meeting, while there had been a financial crisis across the industry during the previous two or three years, over the next couple of years "major carriers will be making obscene profits."

In order to prepare skeptical audiences for premium increases, arguments or "defense mechanisms," as the Vice President put it, were suggested, several of which were included in various drafts of the letter. These strategies all centered upon presenting the corporation as struggling in a threatening economic and political environment. Because it relied upon presenting a "negative" view of the industry and, to a significant extent, of the company, the purpose of preparing audiences for rate increases was at odds with purposes that impelled the projection of a more confident, successful corporate image.
Different Perceptions of Audience

Of the 50 executive letters John Stegman analyzed, only four did not provide a salutation to the reader. Most companies greeted the shareholder, but some greeted employees, customers, and friends as well. Stegman points out that "these corporations made rhetorical choices which reflect not only how they view their owners, but a recognition of other elements in the composite audience" (50). It may be no coincidence that Auldouest's executive letter did not have a salutation. A major source of delay in the approval of the letter was that information about the actual audiences of the document were never communicated to all writers and editors involved in document production (see Table 3). Participants' different perceived audiences of the letter and participants' different prioritizing of those audiences caused misunderstandings and "corrections" that did not solve the underlying discontinuity generated by different perceptions.
Table 3: Perceived External Audiences of the Executive Letter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual Audience</th>
<th>Pres.</th>
<th>SVP</th>
<th>CEO Sec</th>
<th>Pr Sec</th>
<th>VP</th>
<th>Super</th>
<th>Writer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fam/Friends of 33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other CEO's</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>1*b</td>
<td>1*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Ins. Staff</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>Bankers</td>
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<td>Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<td>Comp. Reps w. Clients</td>
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<td>Potential Com. Polhldrs.</td>
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<td>Commercial Polhldrs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potent. Agents</td>
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<td>Agents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pot. Employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic Polhldrs.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>Media</td>
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<td>Public</td>
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</table>

\(a\) 1 = most important; \(b\) * = most important external audience. The Supervisor's most important audiences were the President, the CEO, and other CEO's. The Writer's most important audiences were the President and the CEO.
It may be surprising to note that the middle managers in the corporation had a much more accurate view of the actual audiences of the letter than did the President or the initial ghostwriter, the Writer. But the President had not written the letter before, and he had not worked very much with the writers of Corporate Communications, rising as he had through the data-processing department. Also, because of his position, he would naturally have less access to "life facts" such as who was the audience of the annual report or even of the letter. At the beginning of the process, the Writer had only worked for the company for seven months. Had "author" and ghostwriter worked together from the outset, there probably would have been much less problem with approval, but the letter still would not have adequately addressed all audiences.

All of the participants perceived different composite audiences of the letter and prioritized those audiences differently. Table 3 does not indicate the most important audience of the Writer and the Supervisor because their chief audiences were internal, the CEO and President. The Writer and Supervisor reasoned that these executives had to approve the document. The CEO's Secretary seemed to have the CEO as her primary audience. Since the CEO was inaccessible, it was impossible for me to determine what his perceived audiences were. During all of the
production process I observed, no one mentioned the CEO's perceived audiences of the letter or his prioritization of those audiences. By contrast, the Vice President said the most important audience was external--the consumer. The Senior Vice President and the President felt that other CEO's and insurance people were the most important audience. It is no coincidence that the Senior Vice President, who shared the same audience priority as the President and who reported directly to the President, was the only "successful" ghost writer.

Different Conceptions of Ethos

Different perceptions of the ethos of the "authors" created conflicts. During the first editing session, the Supervisor suggested changing the phrase "the public must understand," which the Writer used in discussing a popular mandate for reform of liability laws damaging to insurance companies. Providing a rationale for her decision, the Supervisor said to the Writer,

Why must they understand it? It's our job to explain . . . . It amazes me how little the public understands.

Since the letter would go to policyholders (who might see themselves as part of a "public" concerned about insurance profits) and the general public via the media, the Supervisor's concern makes sense.
Nonetheless, we must consider the audience the Writer is trying to address in the letter, leaders of various corporations. Given this audience, her words take on a different meaning. If a member of group A tells his peers that a second group "must understand" something, the member may be just indicating to his peers the imperative of educating that second group. The "authors" are not telling the public "You must understand x," but they are rather telling their peers that "we must get the public to understand x." Yet because the Supervisor and Writer did not share the same perceived audiences of the letter, what was intended by the Writer as lateral communication was perceived by the Supervisor as authoritarian downward communication.

After this first editing session, the Writer still perceived the audience of the letter to be executives. In the unusually long approval process that still lay ahead, the above misunderstanding was the first of several that was due to a lack of agreement about audience and ethos.

"Clean Slate" Approach

Disagreement also occurred because original thinking was encouraged. At the beginning of the first brainstorming session of the letter, the Vice President emphasized that because a new President of the company had been appointed in April, new ways of presenting Auldouest
were invited. The Vice President told those present that they were to ignore any preconceived notions of what Auldouest wanted in the documents. Instead they were to suggest how the documents could be put out most effectively in a "contemporary" manner. This directive may have been another reason why the Supervisor delegated the initial drafting of the executive letter to the Writer: the Writer had not been with the company long enough to grasp all of its conventions; also, the Supervisor believed that the Writer had many good ideas.

The "clean slate" approach was also taken after top management rejected the third draft of the letter: three different participants were told to each begin the letter again "from scratch." And although the Senior Vice President read the other two new versions, he did not refer to them once he began his version of the letter. No sentences from those two other drafts appeared in his version. Because new ideas and original approaches were encouraged, different viewpoints based upon different perceptions of audience and ethos emerged and caused conflicts that delayed the approval of the letter. Many of these new ideas and original approaches were ultimately discarded.
Cultural/Power Vacuum

Another pervasive centrifugal factor was the slow emergence of the new president's values. As the Vice President said, the letter "sets the tone" of the rest of the annual report. The person who did more to set the tone of the letter than anyone else was the President, although he did not assert his influence until roughly a month after the first draft was written, seven revisions later. As Alan and William Purves state, "it would appear that learning to write within a culture is a large undertaking, one that requires a good number of years and the accumulation of a great deal of knowledge about the expectations of a culture" (193). Because of new leadership, during most of the process the expectations of the culture (at least regarding the executive letter) were in flux.
Notes

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Because of the interaction of centripetal and centrifugal forces, the group-writing process of the executive letter was largely unsuccessful. Forces acting centripetally caused a substantially flawed end product, and forces acting centrifugally prolonged the letter-writing process inordinately.

A great deal of evidence indicates that the process was unusually lengthy. Most, if not all, of those involved in the 77-day group-writing process of the two-page, 504-word letter believed that this process was inordinately long. The Supervisor, who had been in the Department of Corporate Communications for five of the six years that the annual report had been produced, said that the 1986 process "took a lot longer" than the writing processes of previous executive letters. Compared to the 1985 process, the 1986 process was "much slower, much more difficult," the Supervisor said.
The Vice President said that "so many rewrites" were not typical of the process. The Supervisor said that normally, once the letter had been approved for the first time by the Senior Vice President, it was not redrafted by the "authors." But in this case the letter was redrafted by the "authors," who then rejected their own revision and told three subordinates to begin the letter again "from scratch." "That's pretty unusual," the Supervisor said. While discussing the process, the President said that ghostwriting for an unfamiliar "author" was very difficult. He added that he hoped that this process would improve eventually. The Writer said that normally the approval time for documents she submitted was very quick, and the length of the writing process of the executive letter surprised and concerned her. "It's taking a lot longer than it should," she told me before the letter was approved. The Secretary in the Department of Corporate Communications also remarked to me that the 1986 process was surprisingly long. The CEO's Secretary believed that the 1986 process had serious problems and could have been concluded more quickly if certain steps had been taken.

Because this process had taken longer than normal, "time, energy, and money" had been lost, as one participant said. When one considers that the process involved three of the highest-paid members of the
company—the CEO, the President, and the Senior Vice President—along with two middle managers, an entry-level writer, and two executive secretaries, the financial cost of extra time would not be negligible. The letter missed its deadline by over a month. Also, the rest of the text of the annual report was prepared only after the "tone-setting" executive letter had been approved, a typical practice of the company. The Supervisor told me that the original deadline for the text of the annual report was the end of December. The text of the 1986 annual report was actually approved at the end of February, two months later. The Supervisor said that the writing of the rest of the annual report took no longer than in previous years and that the unusually long process of writing the letter was the chief cause of the delay of the report.

According to Sid Cato, editor of the only publication devoted to the annual report industry, no statistics are kept on the average length of the writing process of the executive letter.1 My literature search supports Cato's assertion. One might argue that although the letter-writing process was inordinately long by Auldouest's standards, this process is comparable to the length of the process at other companies. One would most probably have no data to either support or deny this claim. But even if such a claim were true, its verifiability would not prove that such a process was completely efficient. That the
average automobile in the United States in 1970 averaged less than 20 miles per gallon in fuel consumption did not mean that such energy efficiency could not be improved upon.

One might argue that the process was successful from another standpoint: that the participants had learned more about each other and that this knowledge would result in improved cohesion and a better group-writing process next time. To be sure, the acceptance of the Senior Vice President's draft finally brought the executives together in agreement. As previously shown, the President credited the Senior Vice President with having a superior rapport with the top executives. But several other participants did not indicate that group cohesion had increased. One subordinate said that there had been less "give and take" during the process than previously. Believing that too many readers would be bored or mystified by relatively extensive statistics, another subordinate was displeased that the process had resulted in the amount of financial data the final letter contained. Yet another subordinate said that she had no idea why many of the secretarial changes were made. She had been given no explanation of these changes. Two participants said that communication with the executive secretaries had been nil. No one said that they had learned a great deal from the process, and three participants, including one of the three top
executives, said that they had not learned anything from the problem-ridden endeavor. So the extent of knowledge or cohesion that resulted from this process was probably quite limited.

Not only was the 77-day writing process flawed, but so also was the two-page written product that resulted. Auldouest sent several journalists and over half-a-million policyholders a letter that addressed these audiences chiefly as observers of Auldouest's celebration of great financial gains. The letter did not educate audiences about the difference between surplus and profits, thus leaving itself open to attack by journalists questioning high surpluses. Before the letter was written, the Vice President had received a phone call from one such journalist, and he expected to have to talk to many others. The celebration of financial gains also worked against Auldouest's goal of persuading policyholders that rate increases were necessary. David Mayers, holder of the Shepherd Chair of Insurance at the Ohio State University, agrees that the celebrative presentation greatly risked alienating journalists and domestic policyholders.

Another way the final draft of the letter risked alienating many readers was its use of many poorly explained or unexplained financial statistics. Indeed, nearly half of the letter is made up of such statistics
describing, among other things, surplus and underwriting losses. In including these figures, the final draft qualifies itself for the criticism of Duff & Phelps, Inc., financial analysts commissioned by Arthur Andersen & Co. to make recommendations for the improvement of annual reports. The financial analysts state that management too often repeats statistics in the written text of the report without explaining their significance ("Annual Reports That Fail" 73).

Eliminating underwriting loss figures and the discussion of the loss of a 20% tax deduction also was a step backward from the candor of executive letters prior to 1986, letters that openly mentioned that the company had suffered underwriting losses. Candor is advocated by many authorities on the executive letter, including Richard Lewis and Sid Cato. Lewis states that the letter should "communicate directly the most important events of the year" (22). Thomas Sanders, like Lewis an author of one of the few authoritative books on annual reports, states that the letter "should show what is really going on in the company." Auldouest's reduced candor diminishes the credibility of the letter, making the letter now more open to the widespread criticism of the genre. John Stegman asserts that "the common opinion is that corporations exaggerate their successes [in the letter]." (96). Stegman's study found that this opinion was
"unfortunately" justified for letters of the companies spotlighted in *In Search of Excellence*. Lewis, Sanders, Cato, The Wall Street Journal, Business Week, and others have also criticized the general lack of candor of executive letters. When compared to its predecessors, Auldouest’s 1986 letter supports Cato’s statement that "More than ever, companies are trying to tell it like it ain't" (*Wall Street Journal* 1).

Causes of the Flawed Process and Product

As M.M. Bakhtin states, "It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of a language" (272). The "embattled tendencies" are centrifugal and centripetal forces. Centrifugal forces encouraged conflict and divergent points of view in the group-writing process. Centripetal forces were centralizing forces, forces that encouraged agreement and a unified point of view. Convertible forces had both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies (much like an ion may simultaneously contain positive and negative charges). These forces acted either centripetally or centrifugally, depending upon the situation. During the various phases of the group-writing process, centripetal, centrifugal,
and convertible forces interacted in such a way as to prolong the process and flaw the product.

Forces acting centripetally dominated the initial 33-day period of stability. Due to a lack of clear direction, subordinates in the Department of Communication did not realize that they were expected to contribute ideas for the executive letter, so they did not prepare any ideas. Eliminating much potential for divergent viewpoints, the lack of clear direction served as a centripetal force, encouraging agreement because subordinates were not prepared to disagree. The lack of clear direction from the two "authors" of the letter and a deep-seated "get-along" attitude obscured their conflicting positions toward disclosure of underwriting losses and other unpleasant news. Again acting centripetally, a "get along" attitude fostered in part by a collaborative writing seminar caused the Supervisor to allow the Writer to leave unchanged a few passages the Supervisor objected to.

The Supervisor and Vice President opted to follow the approach to the letter established in previous years, an approach that seemingly met with approval from the most powerful members of the hierarchy. This traditional approach served as a centripetal force because it was familiar to most participants and seemingly agreed upon.
Another centripetal force, a tight deadline on the letter also encouraged participants to agree.

While forces acting centripetally dominated the initial phase of the process, forces that had been suppressed or obscured during this phase emerged to dominate the next phase of the process, the 34-day period of instability. The many audiences of the letter, combined with participants' different perceived audiences of the letter and participants' different prioritizing of those audiences, caused arguments over the ethos of the letter all the way up the chain of command. The encouragement of fresh approaches also contributed to conflict as many of these approaches were rejected. Delegating the letter down six rungs of the organizational hierarchy created an eight-link serial communication chain that caused the deletion of some editorial suggestions, the addition of new "suggestions," and the replacement or modification of other suggestions. The established practice of routing documents through the chain of command, stemming from the strongly hierarchical nature of the organization, ensured that any message from writer to "author" would have to travel through several intermediaries. Indeed, after the Writer completed her first draft of the letter, reviewers impelled seven revisions of the document before the "authors" saw a draft.
Participants were also more "picky" in their editing of the letter because they perceived the document to be very important. Also, at least one "author" insisted that the letter closely reflect his point of view. The intensified scrutiny of the letter served as another cause of disagreement, especially because of the different purposes and participants' different perceived audiences and their prioritizing of those audiences. Much delay was also caused as some of the "authors'" intentions, filtered out of the communication process, were not realized. Furthermore, the "authors" had sufficient clout to be vague in their brainstorming session and then reject the resultant product. Other participants often had sufficient clout to impose their sometimes idiosyncratic logic and "grammar" on the letter. These actions, by damaging what Robert Connors calls the "actio" of the text—the visual presentation that he equates with the delivery of an oration—contributed to the rejection of drafts of the letter (64).

Another centrifugal force that contributed greatly to the conflict in the process was the change in the cultural values of Aulduest with regard to the executive letter, a shift in the degree of candor permitted in the letter. As Cato has said, the writers of the annual report must convey the essence of the company's "story" for the year. The stories of previous years, some told by the CEO in a
tone of restraint, normally explicitly mentioned the company's underwriting losses and gave substantial treatment of the troubles of the industry at large. For the first 42 days of the 77-day process, the "story" the letter told was similar to the previous ones. While the letter pointed out Auldouest's substantial improvement in 1986, as in previous years the letter was restrained and against the backdrop of the struggling industry disclosed the losses that the company had sustained. The "hospital bed" story of the company related a recent past of grave illness, a present stabilizing condition, and a future of gradual recovery to health.

This story was rejected, however, 43 days into the process and replaced by the celebrative "successful" story. This narrative eliminated the gloomy industry backdrop, the mention of Auldouest's tax problem, and the non-technical reportage of underwriting losses. What emerged was a story relating a past of wise decisions and actions bringing about the present era of success, an era that will lead to a future of continued growth and prosperity.

Drawing on the work of literary critic Jonathan Culler, anthropologist Edward Bruner asserts that narratives often serve to make sense out of the present: "The present is given meaning in terms of that anticipated present we call the future and that former present we call
the past" ("Ethnography as Narrative" 142). In changing its stories, Aldouest had clearly changed its representation of its "state of being" to outside audiences. Certainly, the new story may or may not have been fully believed by the participants writing the letter and may not have been even communicated to the rest of the corporate culture. The letter was intended chiefly for external consumption--employees were not given copies of the letter unless they asked for them. But whether or not all of the personnel knew about or believed the new representation of Auldouest's "reality," a significant shift in the company's values had occurred at least with regard to the 1986 letter. The displacement of the "hospital" story by the "success" story meant in part that the glossing over or eliminating of negative details was valued over the candor of previous years. The displacement also meant that the sometimes unnecessarily restrained or negative tone of the letter was made more positive. As pointed out in Chapter 4, at least one of the CEO's previous executive letters probably overemphasized the negative. The revolutionary shift in the tone and candor of the 1986 letter began with the rejection of Draft 4, 42 days into the process. The confusion and conflict attending this major shift contributed greatly to the delay in finishing the written product.
The conjunction of centripetal and convertible forces made the final phase of the group-writing process of the letter, the 10-day period of "resolution," the shortest. Once the top executives had agreed upon and communicated their desire for a positive tone and the elimination of most "negatives," because of the influence of their rank, the "hospital" story lost all influence. The executives' directions for the letter became clearer because the approach was more spelled out and the most powerful competing approach had been rejected. Which of the mixed results to emphasize were now obvious. The long, inefficient chain of communication was eliminated as the Senior Vice President, who enjoyed immediate proximity to the "authors," became the drafter of the letter. Like the President, the Senior Vice President rated other corporate leaders the top-priority audience, and the new drafter eliminated much of the text aimed at audiences that the President did not appear to be aware of.

The extended deadline during this period also created significant pressure for agreement. The annual report was a month and a half behind schedule. Sid Cato states that the deadline of the report typically determines the deadline of the letter. All participants felt that the process had gone on too long and were ready to rapidly complete the document. The goal was to "get it off my desk" or "out of my hair," as two participants put it. As
one participant said even earlier in the process, "When it gets to this point, I just give them what they want." Clearly, the extent that the letter was behind deadline had become a dominating force toward agreement at this stage.

These centripetal forces caused the elimination of divergent viewpoints and strategies that might have improved the final flawed product considerably. Several subordinates had advocated improving the letter's readability by eliminating nonessential statistics repeated in the financial summaries of both the annual report and summary report. Holding the same view as financial analysts Duff & Phelps, Inc., subordinates had recommended more explication of the essential remaining numbers. More discussion of the need for surplus and of the company's losses would have better prepared domestic policyholders for rate increases and journalists for their evaluation of the company's financial condition. Subordinates had previously recommended these treatments of losses and surplus. Had the preceding advice of subordinates been implemented, a better letter would have resulted.

The Importance of This Study

Although research strongly suggests that group writing is widely employed in industry, only two published
descriptive studies of writer-editor revision in industry exist. One study, conducted by James Paradis, David Dobrin, and Richard Miller, does not describe specific instances of collaboration. The other study, Stephen Doheny-Farina's "Writing in an Emerging Organization: An Ethnographic Study," describes a successful group-writing process.

Nancy Allen, Dianne Atkinson, Meg Morgan, Teresa Moore, and Craig Snow state that "A study of . . . 'failed' instances [of collaboration] and their causes would be especially useful to corporations and organizations that encourage collaboration" (87). Literature on the writing of annual reports and literature on collaborative writing suggests that such instances are not uncommon. Over one-third of the respondents to Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede's survey on group writing said that they would not describe their collaborative experiences as "very productive" or even "productive" (76). My study provides a detailed description and analysis of a largely unsuccessful group-writing process. While the detailed process described is unique, reading this description may help business writers and writing teachers think more specifically about potential and actual problems of collaboration.

While previous research focuses upon groups that produce end products about which there is a large degree
of consensus, I focus on a hierarchically functioning group that produced a text that at least one participant privately objected to for good reasons. Allen et al. also state the need for a description of "interaction between the hierarchy of the organization and the hierarchy of collaborative group members" (88). My study describes both this interaction and its counterproductive results in one extended group-writing endeavor.

Lunsford and Ede have called for the description of the group writing of different genres of documents ("Why Write Together?" 152). My study is the first detailed description of the editing of the executive letter of an annual report, a document that is worthy of study for several reasons. The letter is believed by authorities on annual reports to be one of the two most-read sections of this most widely circulated report in industry. Further, the report is one of the most expensive documents produced by business. These documents are not only expensive because of their lavish graphic production but also because they can involve a significant amount of the time of top managers of corporations, managers whose salaries often exceed $1000 per working day. Although not conclusive, literature suggests that these executives give their highly visible letter a good deal of attention. Lastly, literature suggests that the letter has widespread
problems of production and credibility. My description shows how production and credibility problems can occur.

In addition, my study supports the findings of other studies in several ways. Paradis et al. found that at Exxon ITD writing helped to "fit a person into the organization" (296). During the group-writing process of Auldouest's executive letter, the new president eventually changed the tone of the letter to reflect his positive outlook, thus asserting himself as one of the two chief officers of the organization and one of the two ranking members of the group-writing team.

Paradis et al. also found that those writers at Exxon ITD who did not interact with their document assigners during the planning stage of the group-writing process had trouble at the revising stage (294). At Auldouest, the Writer, who was not asked to attend the initial brainstorming meeting with executives, certainly had plenty of trouble at the revising stage. Both Paradis et al. and my study suggest, although we certainly do not prove, that writing teams should interact in invention phases.

Both Doheny-Farina (180) and Allen et al. (83) assert that a group's effectiveness may depend upon its ability to preserve divergent viewpoints. One of the reasons that the Auldouest group was ineffective is that divergent viewpoints were eliminated in several ways described
previously. As we have seen, the approval and implementation of several of the subordinates' ideas would have considerably helped the letter.

Bonnye Miller states that a lack of clear direction is often a problem in producing annual reports, forcing writers to have to guess what "top management really wants or expects, versus what it says" (author's emphasis) (1). At Auldoquest the top managers' positive interpretation of the condition of the company only became apparent 42 days into the group-writing endeavor. Changing stories caused significant problems, delaying further the completion of the letter and the annual report.

This dissertation describes an industrial group-writing process that is recursive, if largely unsuccessful. In fact, group writers in my study began the executive letter "from scratch" at least four times. This study thus disproves the belief that writing in industry is never recursive. The linear model of the writing process is supported by the findings of Glenn Broadhead and Richard Freed and also by the findings of Jack Selzer, who observed subjects whose processes were linear. While the linear model may often accurately describe writing in industry, my study indicates that at least one instance a business document was produced by a recursive process.
Suggestions for Group Writing

While these suggestions are purely speculative, they may be worth considering in the hope of avoiding the largely unsuccessful results of the process described in Chapter 3.

Because of the filtering of "life facts" that causes executives to be unaware of such important information as the audiences and certain important purposes of a document, writing groups should include participants that Doheny-Farina describes as "individuals who represent different constituencies and who have differing interpretations of the organizational context" ("Writing in an Emerging Organization" 180). Of course, such participants must be allowed to voice their views; otherwise, one person might write the document more efficiently. While top managers might be tempted to follow the current trend of "participative management" and eliminate middle managers from a writing group, this study suggests that executives might be wise to give such an impulse second thought. The participant who was aware of the most actual audiences of the letter was the Vice President, followed by the Supervisor and the Senior Vice President.

In planning meetings, rhetorical considerations including the situation, purposes, tone, and actual audiences of the letter and their importance should be
thoroughly discussed, written down, and this record approved by each participant. The record ought to be kept for reference during subsequent drafting and editing sessions of the document. These records should also be kept from year to year and reviewed before the next planning of that kind of document. In communicating key elements with each other during the planning session, participants ought to restate these points two ways in order to avoid what William Haney calls "bypassing," people "talking past each other" (251). This problem occurred in Auldovest's group-writing process when all participants said that the letter should be "positive," but many participants had different conceptions of how to apply positive emphasis to the letter.

Since the centripetal and centrifugal forces inherent in any context of language generate both cooperation and conflict, participants also are advised to have an adequate understanding of conflict and techniques of negotiation. Because disagreement may among other things stimulate or destroy communication, and cooperation may among other things nurture or smother important ideas, forces with the power to prolong or abort group writing ought to be analyzed. Centripetal and centrifugal forces in the writing context should be identified so that constructive forces might be exploited and destructive forces minimalized.
To avoid problems caused by editors imposing idiosyncratic notions of grammar in the name of Standard Edited American English, editors should be asked to use correction symbols such as those listed in Edward P.J. Corbett's *The Little English Handbook: Choices and Conventions*, symbols that indicate kinds of errors. To avoid mixed signals, an organization ought to adopt a single set of correction symbols. Although having to use such symbols might slow down editors somewhat, especially at first, this endeavor may help "keep them honest" or at least accountable. If the editors made erroneous "corrections" of documents, writers would have evidence that would might enable them to contest the editors' instructions. Confronting editors with such evidence might help editors learn to do their jobs better. If the editors continued to impose idiosyncratic "rules of the language" upon writers, such evidence could be grounds for disciplinary action including reassignment or dismissal.

Before the final approval of an important document, participants should meet and without threat of repercussions voice any significant reservations about the final product. After an important document has been sent out to its audiences, an evaluation of the writing process and end product should be made. Feedback ought to be solicited from audiences in a number of formal and/or informal ways. The serious pursuit of such feedback might
yield information that would make not only the product but also the writing process more efficient, helping to eliminate participants' different perceived audiences of the letter and participants' different prioritizing of those audiences, as well as helping to eliminate misconceptions about the reception of the document.

Since this dissertation is not a pedagogical study, its speculative suggestions regarding group writing in the writing class shall be brief. Writing students ought to participate in writing groups in the composition class. But, as Lee Odell has stated, "It will not be enough to ask students to work in groups; we will have to make sure that they know how to do so effectively ("The Influence of Organizational Context on Writing" 38). Several researchers, including Odell, and Doheny-Farina (Writing in an Emergent Business Organization, 217), have concluded that writing students need to be taught interpersonal skills. Reporting the survey responses of 42 entry-level employees of several corporations of the Fortune 500, Anita Bednar and Robert Olney state that these employees far and away rated interpersonal skills over oral and writing skills as the most important for success during their initial years of employment (23). Given the powerful forces of conflict at work in any context of writing, teaching writing students more about conflict and negotiation is called for. Students should also be taught
to get into the habit of conducting evaluations of completed group-writing processes and products, as well as following other group-writing suggestions discussed previously.

The Need For Further Research

Because agreement and disagreement are essential qualities of group writing (a process that has been called "collaborative fighting") (Allen, et al, 80), researchers examining group-writing processes may benefit substantially from applying M.M. Bakhtin's conceptualization of language as a battleground of socially rooted centripetal and centrifugal forces. The wider application of Bakhtin's theory may help us understand and improve the complex sequence of acts that group writing comprises.

Whether that sequence of acts is often recursive needs to be investigated. While some technical writing texts present linear, assembly line models of group writing, this study shows that group writing in industry is not always a linear process. This study does not show that recursive group-writing processes in industry are successful, however. Research needs to be conducted to identify the influence of recursion upon the success or failure of group-writing endeavors.
An important question this study generates is whether participants' different perceived audiences of the letter and participants' different prioritizing of those audiences are a commonplace problem in group writing. Survey or other scientific research might determine whether this occurrence is widespread. Research is also needed to compare the importance of internal and external audiences to writers and editors in industry. Do writers and editors often create documents to suit internal audiences at the expense of external audiences? Is this audience myopia prevalent in documents and/or organizations that receive little feedback from external audiences?

More research on the writing process of the executive letter needs to be conducted. Among the questions to be answered include the following: What is the typical time and expense involved in producing a letter? Could many corporations save much time and money by streamlining this process? What are the typical causes of the lack of candor of the letter?

In order to understand more about the nature of the contexts of language, more ethnographies of "real-world" revision are called for. To look at revisions of drafts and try to analyze them far removed from their writing contexts is to ignore the forces determining most of those changes. To paraphrase Clifford Geertz, we may only
understand the changes by understanding the context of language in which they make sense (Local Knowledge 152), a context stratified and unified by inherent, socially rooted centrifugal and centripetal forces.
Notes


2. Cato, address, 1/13/87.


4. I am indebted to the Video Technician at Auldouest for suggesting that everyone at the prewriting meeting approve a written record of the decisions made at the meeting.

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