Organizational Interactions: A Basic Skeleton with Spiritual Tissue

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Organizing is based on recurring interactions among multiple dyads and groups of people. Interactions may be purely functional, intended at accomplishing performance goals. They may also be purely social, intended at addressing the social needs of organizational members. And they may take the form of some hybrid of the two, likely the most frequent type of interactions in organizations: Interactions intended at accomplishing some formal task also include a social element. Organizations necessarily evolve as a result of the interactions they comprise. Interactions imposed by external, formal structures pave the way to the evolution of other forms of interactions. Both externally defined and emergent interactions ultimately define the quality of an organization (Feldman and Rafaeli, 2001). All interactions may have spiritual qualities. In this chapter we advance an analytical framework that allows a separation between what we call the functional or basic skeleton of an interaction, and the social or spiritual tissue that can accompany this skeleton.

Our analysis as presented here is inductive and conceptual, providing an analytic framework. This analysis draws however from both our review of the literature and several sets of qualitative as well as quantitative data. These data focused, intentionally, on a rather mundane interaction between bus drivers and passengers, our assumption being that routine and mundane interactions can reveal very basic patterns that are likely to occur in more complicated forms in less mundane settings and interactions. We specifically draw on three sets of data: In-depth interviews with bus drivers, structured surveys of bus drivers and passengers, and extensive observations of interactions between bus drivers and passengers. We begin by briefly reviewing available conceptualizations of interactions in organizations. We then briefly discuss additional concepts that can facilitate analyses and the understanding of interactions, as well as the view of interactions as scripted patterns of behavior. These reviews provide the prelude to our introducing and illustrating our key thesis about the tissue
that constructs the spiritual qualities of interactions.

**Conceptualization of Interactions in Organizations**

Conceptualizations of interactions have considered multiple groups of interactants -- leaders and subordinates, employees and customers, employees and co-workers, customers and other customers, to mention but a few. Previous analyses have suggested different classifications for interactions (Bitner, Booms, & Stanfield Tetreault, 1990; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Gremler & Gwinner, 2000; Gutek, Bhappu, Liao-Troth, & Cherry, 1999; Gutek, 1995; 1997; 1999; Lacobucci, 1998; Price, Arnould, & Tierney, 1999; Solomon, Surprenent, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985). In this extant body of research, however, a common dichotomy can be observed between a basic, somewhat ‘narrow’ type of interactions, and a more extensive, elaborate, or ‘broad’ type.

The dichotomy is best captured by Clark and Mills (1993) who talk of two basic modes of interaction – communal and exchange. The exchange mode is one where a transaction is governed by the quest to accomplish a task and a desire for and expectation of immediate and comparable repayment for benefits given previously. The communal mode, in contrast, is governed by the desire for social belonging and is accompanied by expectations for mutual responsiveness to one’s needs. In Clark and Mill’s (1993) analysis an individual participating in a communal interaction demonstrates a general concern for the other person.

This dichotomy is echoed in the work of Gutek and her colleagues (Gutek, 1995; 1997, 1999; Gutek et al, 1999) who suggest that interactions between employees and customers can be classified into two main groups: ‘encounters’ between two strangers, are sporadic service encounters between customers and random service providers. ‘Relationships’, in contrast are recurring interactions between customers and service providers who actually come to know each other on a deeper, more personal level. Parsons (1976) – who analyzed interactions among office workers – argued that most such interactions are work–oriented, although office work does embody informal social
interactions. Price, Arnould and Tierney (1999) similarly suggested a continuum between transactional relationships and interpersonal relationships, proposing a model of three dimensions of service interactions: duration of interaction, affective content, and the level of proxemics among participants. Connecting this model to Gutek’s analysis, interactions that are short, unemotional, and occur in a public (e.g., cinema tickets sales or bank transactions) can be defined as transactional and interactions that have some continuity, and involve emotion and intimacy (e.g., massage, river rafting) can be defined as relationships.

Lovelock and Wright (1999) further defined service delivery as ranging from ‘continuous relationships’ to ‘sporadic transactions’, while the type of contract with the organization is defined as ‘subscriber’ or ‘no formal relationships’. This conceptualization produces four possible combinations that, according to Lovelock and Wright (1999), involve a different structure of service interactions and fit different types of businesses. Liljander and Strandvik (1995) used the typology of ‘episodes’ and ‘relationships,’ where the former (episodes) describes a one-time exchange of value between two parties with no prior or subsequent interaction while the latter describes a relationship that is continuous in nature, and is characterized by commitment, loyalty, and trust.

Thus, although diverse theory and research has examined interactions among individuals in organizational contexts, a common undertone of this work distinguishes between some basic mode of interaction that is brief, episodic and devoid of deep emotion and an alternative mode that involves some recurrence and produces a sense of shared history as well as an emotional connection among participants. A large part of previous work has focused on interactions between customers and service providers, where monetary exchanges is often an integral part. Importantly, the exchange of money is typically assumed to be an element of exchange or business interactions. But money may also facilitate ‘relationship’ or ‘communal’ interactions, as is the case, for example with tipping behaviors. Tips are typically not an essential component of an interaction between customers and service
providers, but rather a form of expressing gratitude by the customer to the service provider (Garrity & Degelman, 1990; Lynn & Latane, 1984; Lynn, Zinkham, & Harris, 1993; Starr, 1988). Whyte (1948) and Spradley and Mann (1975) both documented the social-emotional role that tipping can play for service providers. Tipping behaviors are therefore a form of monetary activity included in communal relationships.

**Additional concepts facilitating analyses of interactions**

A seemingly unrelated body of work examined other organizational relations, such as those between leaders and followers or between employees and organizations. Yet this work also reveals a dichotomy between brief and purely businesslike interactions and more intimate, longer term and interpersonally based interactions. In analyses of leadership, for example, Fiedler (1978) characterized managers as task versus people oriented, and Bass and Avolio (1993) and Yukl (1998) spoke of transactional versus transformational leadership. The ‘transactional leadership’ concept represents leader focus on a short-term interaction with employees, based on rewards and productivity. The ‘transformational’ leader concept, in contrast, represents leader focus on deep continuous relationships, characterized by consideration and a development of interpersonal relations.

Similarly, analyses of organizational contracts distinguish between ‘transactional’ contracts, which are formal-legal contracts between employees and organizations and relational or psychological contracts, which include emotional and psychological commitment of employees (Rousseau and McLean-Parks, 1993; Schein, 1980). Hofstede’s (1991) analysis of cultural values and differences focuses on relations between individuals and their communities. But this analysis also includes a distinction between ‘individualism’ and ‘collectivism’ that, again, focuses on the difference between brief and exchange interactions and deep and emotional relationships.

Thus, across diverse lines of organizational research discussions of interactions ensue, and a distinction is recognized between some brief, formal mode that is presumably devoid of
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a deep emotional experience and an alternative and more emotional and personally involving mode. We view this distinction as central to the understanding of interactions in organizations. We further suggest that this distinction can be viewed as separating elements of interactions that are spiritual, from those that are not. To understand this separation, a view of interactions as scripted patterns of behavior is helpful. As elaborated next, a view into interactions as scripts suggests that rather than distinct forms of interactions, the case may be that analyses of interactions need to refer to two components of any interaction.

**Interactions in Organizations as Scripts**

A second common thread in the diverse analyses of interactions is the implicit reference that interactions comprise predictable yet distinct sequences of behaviors. The ‘cognitive script’ concept was suggested by Schank and Abelson (1977) to capture this predictability and has been recognized central to research in and of organizations (Gioia & Poole, 1984; Lord & Kerman, 1987; Poole, Gray, & Gioia, 1990; Wofford, 1994), and especially the organization of service delivery (Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994; Shoemaker, 1996; Solomon et al., 1985). Within a body of work that considered service interactions as instantiation of cognitive and behavioral scripts (Dwyer et al., 1987; Halpern, 1994; Liljander & Strandvik, 1995; Solomon et al., 1985) the distinction between two modes of interactions is also recognized. Halpern (1994), for example, documented two types of scripts in the selling process – a ‘business’ script and an ‘interpersonal relations’ script. In a similar vein, Leigh and McGrew (1989) documented the existence of two parallel scripts – a ‘professional’ script, comprising business actions, and a ‘personal’ script, which includes, for example, greeting, smiling, shaking hands, or making small talk.

**‘Skeleton’ versus ‘Tissue’ Scripts of Interactions**

We suggest that the distinction between the scripts of interaction actually implies that all interactions hold a common structure that includes two conceptually distinct parts. The
first part, the foundation which we label 'the skeleton of an interaction' is some basic essential core which is similar to the ‘business’ script in Halpern’s (1994) conceptualization, or to the ‘exchange’ idea in Clark & Mill’s (1993) theory. The second, the added on texture, which we call ‘the tissue of an interaction’, accompanies the core or the skeleton, and according to our research is informal and introduces spiritual qualities to interactions. Both the skeleton and the tissue are scripts, and both involve both participants in any interaction. But, as will be elaborated next, there are fundamental and recognizable differences between the skeleton and the tissue script. These differences make the distinction between them conceptually, empirically, and managerially useful.

1. The ‘skeleton’ script.

The ‘skeleton’ script is a basic script that includes some essential content of exchange relations among partners to interactions. This script comprises behaviors addressing the main business action of partners to an interaction without which the interaction would not be viewed as existing. For example, the behavior of ordering from a waiter is the fundamental element or the skeleton of restaurant interactions between waiters and customer. People can dine in a restaurant without performing this behavior but they would not be viewed as interacting with a waiter. That in some restaurants payment is made to the waiter while in others payment is made to a cashier reflects the fact that the skeleton may vary between organizations that otherwise seem similar.

Our studies identify four statements that can be made about the skeleton: (1) The behaviors it comprises are recognized by participants as elements of routine interactions. (2) The behaviors it comprises are taken for granted and therefore frequently not mentioned in descriptions of extra ordinary or extreme interactions. (3) There is agreement among all participants to an interaction about the behaviors comprising the skeleton (Vilnai-Yavetz and Rafaeli, 2001). However (4) these behaviors are likely to be explicitly noted only if an interaction somehow goes astray. People thus seem to treat skeleton behaviors like the
hygiene factors of work conceptualized by Hertzberg (1966): they are not noticed until they are somehow jeopardized. Because of the focus of this volume, we focus in the remainder of the chapter on what we have learned about tissue behaviors.

2. The ‘Tissue’ Script.

The ‘tissue’ script comprises overtly social behaviors, which cannot substitute for the skeletal behaviors, but rather follow or somehow accompany them. Behaviors comprising the tissue script can either improve or deter from the quality of the experience of partners to the interaction. Thus, patrons and waiters can be nice or nasty to each other whilst dealing with the ordering of the food. In both cases, their social (or anti-social) behaviors are tissue that accompanies the skeleton script of ordering from or paying the waiter.

Various bodies of literature have identified behaviors that fit our concept of tissue of interactions, though the focus has typically been on tissue that improves the experience of interaction participants. Organ (1990), for example, suggested a concept of ‘organizational citizenship’ arguing that employees with deep psychological commitment exhibit behaviors that make a contribution both to the organization and to fellow workers and/or customers beyond the formal demands defined by their role. Included in this concept of ‘organizational citizenship’ are, for example, behaviors of helping others or saving resources. In this theoretical framework, formal role demands can be viewed as the skeletal script, while the extra role behaviors represent the tissue of the relationship between employees and the organization. Indeed, additional analyses explicitly speak of ‘pro-social’ and ‘extra role behaviors’ (George and Bettenhausen, 1990; Manrai, 1993).

A prototypical tissue behavior is cooperation. Building on Baron’s (1994) analysis, interpersonal cooperation can similarly be viewed as behavior that is not essential to an interaction and therefore is not the skeleton but does determine the quality of interactions as ‘the tissue’ typically does. Additional tissue elements can include expression of positive emotion, including eye contact, and smiling (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; 1989), creating social
affiliation (Dube et al, 1995; Russell and Mehrabian, 1978) and communicating willfully with others (Kuller, 1991). In the study of consumer behavior, Manrai (1993) distinguishes between routine behaviors, which are part of the formal role, and additional behaviors that are beyond job requirement, such as helping others. Here again, such non-routine elements comprise the tissue of consumer interactions.

The tissue script may, however, hamper rather than enhance the experience of an interaction. In this case as well behaviors manifested in the script are not central or essential to the execution of the interaction, but their display by participants in the interaction produces negative outcomes. Included here, for example, are behaviors of aggression, rudeness and carelessness (Forgas, 1999; Glomb, 2001), or behaviors defined as employee withdrawal (Hanisch and Hulin, 1990; 1991), including tardiness, unwillingness to help others, or deterring communication or coordination with others (Cote, 1999).

The Relationship between the ‘Skeleton’ and the ‘Tissue’ of Interactions

Our choice of metaphors – skeleton and tissue – is not random. Rather, it represents our assumption that the skeleton is an essential and shared foundation of a distinct type of interaction, so that any and all interactions of this type must have this skeleton. Skeletal behaviors are those without which a certain type of interaction does not exist. As noted above, ordering from a waiter is such a skeleton of interactions between waiters and restaurant patrons. Similarly, in our studies of public transportation bus drivers in Israel (where passengers pay the driver when they board the bus) we found that the one behavior that all drivers and all passengers viewed as essential in order for an interaction between driver and passenger to occur was payment\(^1\).

The idea of a skeleton is analytically useful because interactions can be defined as similar to the extent that they share this skeleton. Tissue or each of the tissue components, in contrast, may or may not be apparent in a specific episode of a prototypic interaction, and

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\(^1\) Included were all behaviors associated with payment such as giving or receiving change or a receipt.
interactions may occur without an appearance of tissue behaviors. But the tissue is what
generates the emotional tone of an interaction, much like the tissue of a human body
establishes the nature of an individual’s appearance. Thus similar tissue may appear atop
different skeletons, and similar skeletons can be accompanied by different tissue.

As in the human body, the skeleton is a foundation, and operates as a dichotomy: it
either does or does not exist. If it does not exist, conceptually the interaction does not exist.
The tissue, in contrast is a more complex notion, in that each of its components may or may
not appear. A large and varied set of behaviors can compose the tissue, including verbal,
para-verbal and non-verbal behaviors. To illustrate, performance evaluation discussions
between a sales clerk and her manager (a specific type of work interaction) are premised on a
manager appraising an employees’ job performance. In these meetings, however, the manager
may or may not smile, be courteous, be assertive, praise or thank the employee for her
performance. These would all be ‘tissue’ behaviors, and their appearance or lack thereof
cannot negate the fact that an interaction occurs, although they are likely to influence the tone
of the interaction.

Different interactions will likely compose different tissue behaviors, but also
participants in an interaction may disagree about whether elements of a tissue should be
manifest in a certain type of interaction. For example a passenger may not thank a driver
assuming that the driver was merely doing his job so should not be thanked. In this vein,
Rafaeli (1989) reports that employees do not feel they should smile to customers because
they (the employees) are paid to process merchandise not to be nice to customers. Thus, a
tissue script is not always fully activated in a specific manifestation of an interaction. The
extent to which this script is activated depends on multiple factors, such as status relations
among participants. Whether an interaction is between a manager and an employee, an
employee and another employee, or an employee and a customer is likely to influence the
nature of the activated tissue script (Leigh and McGrew, 1989; Halpem, 1994). Other factors
may include cultural norms of behavior (Hall, 1987, 1990; Schwartz, 1992, 1996) as well as professional standards (Abbott, 1993; Bazerman and Paradis, 1991) regarding what is and isn’t appropriate or even acceptable to an interaction. Becker, Geer, Hughes, and Strauss (1961), for example, describe how medical doctors learn professionally acceptable tissue behaviors to accompany medical diagnoses.

In short, the base of any interaction is ‘the skeleton’ which exists in any occurrence of an interaction, and therefore defines a specific type of interaction. The skeleton is similar to what Clark and Mills (1993) defined as an exchange mode of interpersonal interactions, and what Rousseau and McLean-Parks (1993) called the transactional mode of a contract between individuals and organizations. It includes giving and receiving processes, which construct the foundation of a transaction. The ‘tissue’ accompanies this ‘skeleton’ in some cases, but comprises behavior that can accompany different skeletons. Tissue behaviors include commitment, loyalty, and willingness to help, and are thus similar to behaviors included in the communal mode of interaction identified by Clark and Mills (1993). However, contrary to prior conceptualizations, we suggest that the processes comprising skeletal and tissue behaviors are not mutually exclusive, or extreme ends of one continuum. Rather, skeleton and tissue behaviors are different elements of the very same interaction, similar to the skeleton and tissue of the body of any living organism.

Initial empirical support for this idea of the ‘skeleton’ and ‘tissue’ scripts is evident in a study by Sutton and Rafaeli (1988). This study reported that in stressful conditions employees tend to primarily perform formal job requirements, or ‘the skeleton’ of the job. In contrast, when stress is low, according to Sutton and Rafaeli (1988), employees tend to express positive emotion, smile, and thank customers, in addition to performing their formal duties. Thus, in the report by Sutton and Rafaeli (1988) the skeleton – of providing basic customer service such as accepting payment and bagging groceries -- appeared in all manifestations of interactions between grocery store clerks and their customers. The tissue, in
contrast, appeared only in some interactions, those occurring during what Sutton and Rafaeli (1988) identified as “slow times” in the store. Thus, the business script – the skeleton -- is included in every business interaction while the friendship script is activated only when at least one side of the interaction views the situation as appropriate for social interactions (see also Leigh and McGrew, 1989 and Halpern, 1994).

Can Tissue Behaviors Become a Part of the Skeleton?

There can be an appropriation of tissue behaviors into the skeleton. When organizations or clients expect certain behaviors as fundamental elements of employees’ role they are attempting to define the skeletal behaviors of a role. McDonald’s, for example, trains employees to smile and greet customers, defining these smiles as an essential part of the job (Ritzer, 2000). Disneyland similarly maintains formal rules regarding displayed emotion as part of employees’ roles. Van Maanen (1995: 295) cites from the rules book of the University of Disneyland:

First we practice the friendly smile. Second we use only friendly and courteous phrases. Third, we are not stuffy – the only Misters in Disneyland are Mr. Toad and Mr. Smee.

Similarly, retail outlets have been seen to post signs or make employees wear tags saying “$5.00 if I don’t smile and ask you how you are doing today ” (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; 1989). Such requests essentially co-opt tissue elements into the skeleton of the job required from employees. The integration of tissue into the skeleton may be motivated by customer expectations, wherein the smiles of employees have become fundamental (skeletal) elements of good customer service.

However, although it may look as if tissue behaviors become part of the skeleton, this is not necessarily true since these behaviors do not necessarily appear in all interactions. In social welfare occupations, tissue elements, such as smiling and helping, may be argued to be the skeleton of the interaction between employees and clients. When agents such as social
workers or nurses perform only technical parts of their job (e.g., filling forms, distributing welfare checks or taking blood tests), it is often argued that they are not performing their job. But employees can stop smiling or being empathetic while they cannot stop filling forms or taking blood tests. This has been argued to occur, for example, among burnt out employees (Maslach and Leiter, 1997) and among employees working under high pressure (Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1990).

Thus, although there may be some overlap between skeletal and tissue behaviors, our definition of the qualities of the two sets of behaviors clarifies where a particular behavior belongs. If a behavior is mentioned by all participants and is taken for granted by participants as integral to an interaction it is a skeletal behavior. Other behaviors are tissue behaviors. As we argue next, tissue behaviors are the behaviors that introduce spirituality into interactions in organizations.

**Tissue of Interaction as Spiritual Elements**

Why does the idea of tissue and skeleton of interactions belong in this volume on spirituality? We have come to learn that the tissue script is what introduces spirituality into routine organizational interactions. In spirituality we refer to individuals’ concept of what is the best, of what it means to help others be their best, and what it means to feel a sense of connectedness with work and co-workers. Tissue behaviors are precisely the behaviors that either promote or hinder such spiritual desires. Tissue elements are the added-on elements that accompany the cores or skeletons of interpersonal interactions and that add a spiritual flavor to interactions. Such accompanying can facilitate the interaction, introducing a positive tone, which is what happens when one partner to an interaction is pleasant, polite, or empathetic. However accompanying tissue can hamper the positive flow of the interaction, introducing a negative tone, which is what happens when one partner is aggressive, rude, or impatient.

In this way, tissue of interactions comprises elements that move interpersonal
relations from being formatted as an exchange to being formatted as communal in Clark and Mill’s (1993) conceptualization. Similarly, tissue elements distinguish between encounters and relationships in Gutek’s (1997) conceptualization. Indeed, communal relations in Clark and Mill’s (1993) conceptualization and relationships in Gutek’s conceptualization have a spiritual overtone.

**What do we know about the spiritual tissue of interactions?**

There is a multitude of behaviors that may dress up the skeleton, and individual and situational variations determine precisely which of these behaviors occur in a given interaction. Importantly, the tissue comprises behaviors, not thoughts or feelings that accompany an interaction. Thus we are not talking about how people feel during an interaction, a notion that has been explored by studies of ‘affective scripts’ (Conway & Bekerian, 1987; Demorest & Alexander, 1992; Karniol & Ben Moshe, 1991; Russell, 1987), but rather on what people do during an interaction. However, tissue behaviors do tend to influence how people feel during interaction.

Tissue behaviors may be verbal (greeting, answering a question), non-verbal (eye contact, touching, help to carry luggage) and para-verbal (talking politely, speaking loudly) (Oksenberg, Coleman, & Cannell, 1986). They also may improve or enhance the quality of the experience of partners to an interaction, as well as hamper or damage this experience, as summarized in Table 1. Table 1 specifically includes examples of tissue behaviors extracted from our study of critical incidents of good and bad passengers as described by bus drivers, following the methods described by Bitner, Booms and Mohr (1994). As evident in Table 1, tissue behaviors may either improve an experience or damage it. Spiritual tissue behaviors are not necessarily rare or unusual. They are simply not part of the formally prescribed routine interaction. Precisely this combination defines the spiritual tissue of interactions – behaviors that are (1) not essential for an interaction to ensue, but (2) recognizable, when they occur, to all interaction participants. Thus, although Table 1 cites quotes from specific
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informants, similar examples will be evident in reports from other informants.

There is a certain pattern to the emergence of the specific tone of spiritual tissue. The pattern involves some trigger, which leads to ensuing behaviors that, in turn, produce the emotional overtone of the interaction. Both the trigger and the ensuing behavior can be viewed as parts of the tissue of the interaction, the emotion being their respective spiritual outcome. Consider the following brief description by a driver of ‘the worst passenger’ he ever met:

The bus was delayed for almost an hour. A passenger boarded the bus and said to me that I was a moron and I immediately answered that she should calm herself down and that in my bus there is no swearing. She got on and swore at every opportunity, and there was another passenger who got up and told her to shut up.

This report is from one driver, but its elements of the story, including the triggering event of the bus being late and the emergent behaviors of a passenger being annoyed and nasty at the driver was related by in multiple reports. Similarly, a recurring narrative we encountered was of customers making special, personal, or illegal requests from a driver. The driver’s reaction in all these stories produced a certain set of tissue behaviors – swearing, yelling, rudeness, etc. -- which established the emotional tone of the interaction. Consider another example of a narrative:

A young passenger asked me to let him off at a point that is not a formal stop. When I refused to stop there, and told him that I was not allowed to do that, he got annoyed and angry, to the point of yelling, swearing and being physically violent.

In this example, as well, the triggering event is clear (the customer request for a special stop), as are the tissue elements of behavior of both driver and passenger, and the emergent emotional tone of the interaction. As evident in these two examples, we found that tissue behaviors can be grouped according to the triggering events. A typical set of triggering events, evident in the above example, involved demands for special or unusual
attention from the driver, frequently demands that call for some violation of formal organizational rules. Interestingly, however, such violations can produce both positive and negative emotional overtones. Positive overtones occur, for example, when a passenger asks to be let off outside a formal stop and the driver agrees, leading the passenger to report very positive tissue behaviors and a positive emotional tone of the interaction. Negative overtones occur when a passenger asks to be let off outside a formal stop and the driver does not agree, leading the passenger to report very negative tissue behaviors producing a negative emotional tone of the interaction. In both cases, the driver was asked to violate formal rules, and the behaviors of both driver and passenger are tissue behaviors since they are not essential for the trip.

Tissues of interactions can also be categorized according to the behaviors they embody. Tissue behaviors can include verbal demands or para-verbal aspects such as yelling or swearing. In studying bus drivers and passengers we also found tissue behaviors of accusations of incivility or even racial discrimination, which introduced a negative tone into the interaction. But tissue behaviors may also improve the interaction experience when they include, for example, complementing, encouraging or joking as part of an interaction.

As evident in our analysis so far, three issues should be highlighted with respect to tissue elements of interactions: First, tissue elements are recognized as plausible elements of an interaction by multiple participants. Second, these elements are not deemed essential to the fulfillment of the formal goals of the interaction, and do not always appear when the interaction occurs. Third, tissue behaviors influence the affective tone of the interaction. It is this pattern of influence that leads us to view the tissue as introducing a spiritual element to interactions.

Most central is the fact that tissue behaviors can be conceptually divorced from the goals of the interaction. People can be nice, polite, helping and say thank you to anyone, not only to a bus driver. People can also be nasty, impolite, or impatient with anyone. As shown,
these elements may be positive or negative, meaning they may produce positive or negative emotion or pleasantness and unpleasantness (Russell and Mehrabian, 1977). However, the spiritual tissue does influence the quality of an interaction.

Positive elements that bear a positive influence on the interaction have the potential to support the accomplishment of the formal task at hand, or the goal of the interaction, by aligning the interaction with the correct script. As with many other things, therefore, spirituality may not be a necessary part of formal organizational operation, but it can bear an influence on such operations. The following, again from our study of bus drivers, illustrates this point:

During a very long trip I was tired because I had only a very short stop during the long ride. The passengers understood my situation and tried to help. They offered me food and drink, were really nice to me, and helped me find my way when I made a mistake and took a wrong turn.

As evident in this description, there is a spiritual quality to the tissue, because of the emotional tone that it produces. Both the passengers and the driver in this example very likely felt a sense of uplifting from the common experience. Similarly, in the following report of a driver the spiritual tissue of the interaction bears a positive influence on the interaction, and supports the accomplishment of the formal task:

During an ordinary trip, warm relationships with a few passengers were formed. We were talking, passing information and telling jokes. When another customer, at the back of the bus, lighted a cigarette (which was forbidden), one of my “new friends” told him to put it out, and it allowed me to concentrate on driving instead of on fighting with passengers.

In this story, the situation described combines a positive emotional tone of the interaction with an enhancement in the quality of task performance. Thus, the spiritual quality of the tissue does influence goal accomplishment. In a similar vein, Price, Arnould, and Tierney (1999) focused on an extreme case of service relationships, and describe interactions formed during a rafting trip. They documented empathy, communication, intimacy, friendship, and emotional reactions as integral to such interactions. Their study
suggests that these spiritual elements bring both participants in the interaction to perform beyond the call of duty. The service provider gives something in addition to his or her formal role (smile, social invitation, good advice, etc) and the customer does the same, by reacting with something that is more than payment. Thus, spiritual behaviors can turn any interaction into a successful one.

In sum, although not essential, tissue behaviors can help or facilitate the accomplishment of formal, skeletal organizational tasks by introducing a positive emotional tone to role interactions. The spiritual tissue sets up the emotional qualities of the interaction, which is part and parcel of quality task accomplishment.

**Implications for Research and Management**

We have suggested a conceptual framework for the analysis of interactions. The framework distinguishes between a skeleton, or the core behaviors essential to and addressing the goals of a specific interaction, and additional elements, that we label tissue behaviors, which we suggest introduce spirituality into interactions. Both the skeleton and the tissue are scripts, and both involve multiple participants in any interaction. One builds on the other, the skeleton being the core upon which the tissue builds. Yet, we wish to suggest that, similar to the skeleton and tissue of a human body, both are somehow important to interactions.

Since the skeleton relates to the immediate task of the individuals involved, as well as the organization in which they operate, it may appear to be more important. The tissue, in this light may seem to be peripheral, or unimportant. Indeed, without the skeleton the mere existence of the interaction can be challenged. Organizational operations that depend on interactions are likely to be jeopardized when the skeleton of an interaction is compromised, positioning the skeleton as critical to organizational functioning. Yet the skeleton is where technology can often replace people. Banking interactions, for example, have been to a large extent substituted by interactions with technology in the form of Automatic Teller Machines (ATM’s), deposit boxes, and electronic banking. The interaction we chose to study – between
drivers and passengers – has also been stripped of its skeleton in those countries where passengers do not pay the driver.

But the tissue is what produces the texture and the emotion of an interaction, establishing the spiritual experience of an interaction. Tissue is what determines how people feel during and after an interaction. As with the human body, while the skeleton keeps the interaction together, the tissue keeps it alive. It is the tissue that gives an interaction its flavor, introducing spirit into an exchange. The tissue recognizes the partners to the interaction as human beings. The tissue may not be directly addressing organizational goals, but it does promote other important goals. Factors such as felt or displayed feelings of employees or customers, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, commitment or alienation, citizenship or lack thereof are all influenced by the tissue. It would therefore be inappropriate to say that the tissue is not important to organizations. We see multiple theoretical and applied implications to our analysis, as we discuss below.

**Toward future research**

Our analysis suggests an extensive research agenda regarding spirituality in interactions. One question that demands attention regards the precise mapping of skeletal versus tissue behaviors of multiple interactions, and the consequent identification of spiritual (tissue) elements of interactions. We can suggest that such mapping should separate between verbal (what is said), para-verbal (how it is said) and non-verbal issues (Oksenberg, Coleman, & Cannell, 1986), and also between multiple aspects of non-verbal behaviors such as facial or postural issues (Bartel and Saavedra, 2000). Such mapping will provide insights about what organizational goals are accomplished by various interactions, and what spiritual contributions these interactions make. For example, Schwartzman (1989) and Feldman and Rafaeli (2001) suggest that interactions in various organizational meetings intended to promote decision-making goals actually promote more spiritual ends of connections among participants. Stripping meetings of their tissue elements, which may be performed in the
interest of more effective decision-making, may strip them of their tissue, leading to a stripping of their spiritual contributions.

Once mapping of skeleton and tissue of interactions is accomplished it can also pave the way to understanding which tissue behaviors improve upon interactions and which in turn are damaging to interactions. That some tissue elements are positive while others are negative is evident, for example, in the description of Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton’s (2000) analysis of positive and negative relationships among academic professionals. They illustrated that relationships are central to professional’s performance, but that not all professional interactions necessarily improve role performance. Caution is required here, however, because the notion of improvement is problematic, because not all behaviors that on may appear positive necessarily promote organizational goals. Sutton and Rafaeli (1988) and Rafaeli (1989), for example, argue that behaviors that appear to be positive (e.g., smiling) do not always promote organizational goals while behaviors that may appear neutral or even negative (e.g., nastiness) do not always hamper interactions. They report that mild rudeness by customer service employees was actually perceived by both employees and customers as facilitating the customer service interaction, because they were speeding it up.

A second research direction regards the respective appearance of skeleton and tissue. Under what conditions does a skeleton appear without any tissue? Are there conditions in which the tissue overrides the skeleton? Are there conditions that inspire tissue behaviors that are damaging rather than enhancing interactions? Our analysis suggests that tissue behaviors are contextual meaning that whether or not they appear depends on parameters of a particular situation. Whether skeleton behaviors appear is less negotiable, since they seem to be essential foundations of an interaction. If a customer does not pay for merchandise, for example, some basic element of organizational performance is compromised. The definition of skeleton behavior was that they appear as routine part of an interaction. Tissue behaviors, in contrast, may or may not appear in a given instance of an interaction depending on a host
of factors such as who else is present, or where or when the interaction is taking place. Given such contextuality of tissue behaviors, research is needed to identify conditions that inspire spiritual tissue, and to separate them from conditions that bring about tissue that is damaging to individual and organizational goals.

The separation between skeleton and tissue of interactions also bears methodological implications for studies of interactions. It suggests that studies that somehow rely on data about routine interactions are likely to reveal skeletal properties while studies that rely on data about interactions that are in some way special, atypical or extreme are likely to unravel tissue behaviors. Spirituality in interactions will likely be lost if only routine transactions are examined. Yet, our examples from our study of bus drivers reveal that even a mundane interaction, such as between a bus driver and passenger can be shown to include spiritual elements. Thus studies of interactions must complement techniques that focus on the routine (e.g., observations and surveys) with techniques that focus on the unusual (e.g., critical incidents).

**Toward Spirituality in Management of Interactions**

From a managerial perspective our analysis reflects dynamics of service delivery wherein there are certain behaviors that a service process cannot do without and other behaviors that somehow add flavor to the process. In the case of bus drivers the basis is payment by passengers, for example. But organizational reward systems do not always recognize the distinction between tissue and skeleton. Employees may, for example, be reprimanded for **not** exhibiting certain tissue behaviors, as is the case when passengers complains about a rude driver. Thus, the analysis suggests a potential inconsistency in the management of service providers: Interactions are frequently delineated by the skeletal behaviors, yet implicit expectations (of management and customers) exist for tissue behaviors (e.g., friendliness). Reward programs that focus on the skeleton rather than the tissue (Kerr, 1975) can produce frustration for employees and maladaptive processes for organizations.
However, the definition and measurement of whether or not the skeleton is manifest in an interaction is far easier than a definition or measurement of whether or not the tissue is manifest. Customers may complain that a service provider is not polite, but the employee may argue that he or she is being polite. Disagreements about the quality of the tissue are therefore far more difficult to resolve than disagreements about the skeleton. Encouraging in this regard is Bartel and Saavedra (2000) illustration that inter-judge reliability can be established regarding positive emotional displays.

Separating skeleton from tissue elements is also critical in order to identify what must go on even in stressful situations. When a bus is loaded with passengers and driving is difficult, a driver can stop joking with passengers, but should not stop collecting payment. In general, recognition is necessary of behaviors that should not be compromised under any circumstances, read skeleton behaviors. In this vein, when employees burn out from customer service, the skeleton is typically not jeopardized, but tissue behaviors are compromised (Maslach and Leiter, 1997).

Also important managerially is a distinction between employees’ tasks and role responsibilities and their behavior vis-a-vis interactions that their job entails. In the case of bus drivers the separation is between driving the bus safely and interacting with customers. This may be viewed as a matter of level of analysis issue (Rousseau, 1985). The former is at the individual (employee) level; the latter is at the inter-personal (dyadic) level. Management of the former, the employee, focuses on skills and abilities of the employees and includes selection and training in technical aspects of the job. Management of the latter must focus on two groups of people -- employees and customers – because the behavior of one partner to an interaction is necessarily influenced by the behavior of the other partner. When a job entails interpersonal interactions, management must include analyses of these interactions in skills training programs. Thus, Bowen (1986) speaks of customer participation as a key foundation of service delivery. Mills & Morris (1986) and Bowen (2000) speak of customers
as partial employees and Mills, Chase, and Margulis (1983) speak of employees as partial customers.

Our analysis brings forth the argument that a focus only on the individual level may be problematic in two ways. First, it might improve the employee’s technical skills (better driving abilities), but this is not sufficient because it ignores the interpersonal elements of the job. Second, even if a dyadic view of the job is maintained, selection and training programs must recognize not only on skeleton behaviors but also tissue behaviors because they determine the spiritual tone of interaction.

Finally, managerial attention needs to focus on the implications of introducing technology as a substitute for human interaction for skeleton and tissue of interactions. Technology typically performs technical, skeletal rather than tissue properties of interactions. This does not mean that tissue behaviors are becoming unimportant, but rather that more effort is required in order to keep tissue elements “alive” (Hallowell, 1999). As Hallowell (1999) describes, such efforts are essential if the human nature of organizational participants is to be recognized.

Electronic and computer communication can replace some of the skeleton of organizational interactions. A customer can send an order through the internet and receive the product home in a few days, without any social contact. In such electronic commerce people (employees and customers) may not see, talk, or smile to each other. The emergence of displayed emotions in electronic media (e.g., the when :-) is inserted to represent a smile), for example, illustrates that people need the tissue elements even in the electronic or cyber context. Emergent electronic communities in cyber-space seem to reinforce our notion that a skeleton divorced of tissue is likely to die. Seidel, Dukerich, & Bertolotti, (2001), for example, talk about different types of relationships among organizational members and focus on communal relationships among individuals, contributing voluntarily to a wide network of independent computer programmers. The network they describe is knitted together only by a
social contract. Seidel et al (2001) illustrate how the skeletal behaviors (programming an additional patch for shared software) combine with tissue behaviors (forming a voluntarily social network that helps, encourages, and support its members) to form a new type of organizational relationship. The relationship may be the relationship that will predominate the future, technological world, that is primarily based on web rather than face to face communication.

Adding our skeleton and tissue concepts to this description allows us to analyze and understand the uniqueness of cyberspace relationships. When interactions are computer-mediated participants need to put in much more effort in order to maintain the impression that they are interacting in a ‘regular’ way (Panteli, 2001). The importance of the tissue is thus significantly elevated, perhaps to the point that it will become skeletal. As noted by Hallowell (1999) the need to keep the “human moment” in technology-based business is increasingly important to effective organizational operations.

In traditional managerial issues, and even more in the computer mediated communication context, mentoring is a good example in which our concepts of skeleton and spiritual tissue can be helpful for analysis. Mentoring is a type of a relationship that builds on multiple formal and informal interactions. In mentoring and socialization interactions there are spiritual needs (such as social support and friendliness) that the skeleton (skills training and learning of rules and norms) cannot meet. Ragins (1997) distinguished between two types of functions and behaviors employed by mentors – the ‘career development’ behaviors (coaching, providing challenging assignments, etc), that parallel to our concept of ‘skeleton’, and the psychosocial functions (acceptance, opportunity to discuss personal problems, etc), which form the base for the ‘spiritual tissue’ behaviors. The boundary between tissue and skeleton is unclear in this case, as mentoring includes, in nature, both learning formal things about the job and organization, and social-emotional support for the individual. but the importance of the terms ‘skeleton’ and ‘tissue’ increases. Ragins and Noe (1997) describe a
mentoring process through e-mail and other electronic media, in which time and geographic constrains are avoided and the transfer of more information enabled, thus facilitating the skeleton behaviors. The effectiveness of this process and the problems which it involved, we claim, can be understood if the notions of skeleton and tissue are applied.

In short, we suggest that separating skeleton from tissue elements of interactions is critical in order to maintain effective organizational interactions. Recognizing the spiritual tissue of interactions, and its influence on organizational operations can be a critical step toward understanding and enhancing organizational spirituality.
References


Poole, P. P., Gray, B., & Gioia, D. A. (1990). Organizational script development through


Table 1: Spiritual tissue elements: examples from a critical incidents study

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Communication</th>
<th>Influence on Experience of Interaction Partners</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improving the Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Verbal</strong></td>
<td>Greeting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thanking</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sending a letter of thanks to the driver or praising him</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Expressing concern about driver</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talking to or joking with driver</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Para-verbal</strong></td>
<td>Laughing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talking politely and courteously</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Verbal</strong></td>
<td>Sitting in back reducing crowding</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smiling</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acting in a friendly way</td>
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<td>Cooperating with driver</td>
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<td>Giving driver candy</td>
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