

**THE EVOLUTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY CLAIMS  
AND THE ROLE OF COMMEMORATION AND HISTORY  
IN A FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESS**

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother, who gave me unconditional love and the ability to feel I was worthy of whatever I wanted in life; to my father, who taught me at an early age that education is important, that I could do anything I put my mind to and to never say, “I can’t” but only that “I can”; and to my husband, Michael, who gives me undying and continuous support and is a constant source of encouragement, providing the unspoken message that I am my own person who is free to pursue whatever is important to me. I also want to thank my children, Justin and Genevieve, for the joy they bring to my life and for believing in me.

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I am forever grateful for having the opportunity to experience the journey that achieving this doctorate has afforded me. I will always value the relationships that I made with the cohort and faculty of Cohort 16, and I wish all of my other cohort colleagues success in completing their dissertations at whatever pace works for them in their busy lives. Others in the group have been supportive to me in this process as well and I would like to thank them for their words of encouragement: Elizabeth Ross, Edmina Bradshaw, Fritz Krauss, Bob Brescia, Meg Gottemoeler, Bill Toms, and Carmen Panzar. Other friends, neighbors, and family members have been patient with me as well while I have been on this journey, as I have not been as available or attentive a friend or family member as I would like to be. Whatever part anyone played, it has been deeply appreciated.

And finally, I owe a great deal to Sid Dewberry, founder, owner, and chairman of the board for Dewberry, for giving me permission to use Dewberry as the site for my research. I wish to thank him from the bottom of my heart for his kindness and support in this process as well as Barry Dewberry, Ron Ewing, my manager, Dell Nunaley, and my staff and coworkers. I also want to say thank you to those employees of Dewberry who gave their time to be interviewed or to participate in a focus group for me. My only hope is that they are pleased with the results of this study.

## **Abstract of Dissertation**

### **The Evolution of Organizational Identity Claims and the Role of Commemoration and History in a Family-Owned Business**

This qualitative case study focused on the two constructs of organization identity, i.e., features that are core, distinctive, and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006), and collective memory, specifically history and commemoration as defined by Schwartz (2000). The study examined how the features of organizational identity were commemorated over time in a 52-year-old family-owned business by analyzing official histories as well as conducting interviews, focus groups, and observation. A cohort approach to gathering the data was used, with cohorts defined by the decade when employees started to work for the organization (Ryder, 1965).

This study provides information on how organizations continue to examine their identity throughout their life cycle. The key findings in relation to organizational identity showed that the core, distinctive, and enduring (CDE) features of the firm did not change. Data analysis revealed the CDE features across all cohort groups as follows: care of employees, client focus, diverse capabilities, family-owned business, growth, integrity, land development, and quality. Findings also linked history and commemoration with organizational identity by showing how they helped to shape the identity of the firm. The influence of the founder and the feeling of “family” were also strong features of the organization’s identity and indicated that the organization’s identity can be considered a “hybrid identity” (Gersick, Davis, Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Corley & Gioia, 2004).

**Key words:** Organizational identity, collective memory, family-owned business, hybrid identity

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## **CHAPTER 1:**

### **INTRODUCTION**

I confess that it's always been difficult for me to put my finger on what makes this firm special. . . . But the firm is special—on that point I have no doubt.  
—Sidney Dewberry, Founder and Chairman of the Board (Dewberry & Brown, 2006, p. 8)

This qualitative case study explores the evolution of organizational identity through an analysis of organizational histories and commemorative practices in a family-owned business. This study analyzes organizational identity features, i.e., features that are core, distinctive, and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006), that serve to maximize the organization's distinctiveness from other organizations over time (self-other comparison), and that are referenced in self-self comparisons. As Whetten (2007) explained, "Enduring organizational features constitute the most reliable means for organizations distinguishing themselves from similar others" (p. 7). This chapter presents a basis for the study by outlining the context of the problem, the research purpose, the research question and subquestions, the significance of the study, the conceptual framework, the methodology, the assumptions, the delimitations and limitations, and the definitions of key terms.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

One central issue in the discussion of organizational identity—"that which distinguishes the organization on the basis of something important and essential" (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 2)—has been its temporal nature. The organizational identity literature (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006, 2007; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Corley, Harquail, Pratt, Glynn, Fiol, & Hatch, 2006) includes much debate about the

enduring component of the definition of organizational identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Whetten (2007) theorized that reviewing the features of the organization's identity that have been preserved through the organization's history is of empirical value. This study provides a historical review of an organization's identity, determining which features have endured the test of time and have remained central or core (the two terms are used interchangeably throughout this document) as well as those that have distinguished this organization from others in its social category.

According to Whetten (2007), the features of the organization that are commemorated over time reveal what the organization holds true about its uniqueness, how the founder and/or other stakeholders want it to be remembered, and with what features the founder and others want people to associate. Commemorations are one of the ways that society celebrates or recognizes the memory of an event (Schwartz, 2000). Schwartz (2000) maintained that while commemoration and history perform different roles, they are very interdependent, and we confuse the two by evaluating them against each other. He described history as reflecting "the ideals and sentiments that commemoration expresses" (Schwartz, 2000, p. 12) and said that commemoration is taken from past knowledge. Schwartz believed that the primary role of commemoration is to highlight the most significant events from history.

History too is dependent on interpretations by the current generation and the political times in which people live. In the case of President Lincoln, "people's love and respect for him rose after his death, then waned after decades passed, then rose again in a different century" (Schwartz, 2000, p. 65).

Pratt and Foreman (2000) and others (Corley et al., 2006) summarized the controversy as whether organizational identity is enduring, as Albert and Whetten (1985) saw it, or whether it is evolving and adapting to the changing needs of the organization (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). Gioia et al. believed that identity is fluid and unstable since it adapts to the changing external environment to which organizations are subjected. The fundamentally different views can be linked to their underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions.

Whetten (2006) clarified the links among the three elements of organizational identity, saying that all three are needed. He essentially said that the central elements stay the same over time, which means they are enduring, whereas Gioia et al. said that the meaning of the identity claims changes as organizational members try to make sense of the changing environment. Whetten (2007) emphasized the “phenomenological and ideational treatments of organizational identity” (p. 1) as how people view the enduringness aspect of what is central, distinct, and enduring (CDE). He saw enduringness as being part of the organization’s deep structure, while Gioia et al. espoused the view that the organizational features can change based on the members’ perceptions.

In discussing the distinctiveness aspects of organizational identity, Whetten (2007) highlighted the need for organizations to be similar to other firms in the group to which they claim to belong and to also be seen as being distinct in some way from their competitors. This theory is based on Brewer’s (1991) principle of optimal distinctiveness. Whetten noted: “Consistent with Brewer’s use of the similarity-uniqueness tension, organizational applications have focused exclusively on *self-other* comparisons between

organizations at a point in time” (Whetten, 2007, p. 2). Whetten also added a “temporal dimension to the notion of optimal distinctiveness, extending it to include retrospective and prospective *self-self* comparisons of the same organization over time” (Whetten, 2007, p. 2).

The importance of an organization’s history to its identity has been noted in recent research on organizational identity. In the Ravasi and Schultz (2006) study of the relationship between organizational culture, identity, and image, the importance of the organization’s history was apparent. Managers in the research site revised their organization’s identity claims to renew them. Ravasi and Schultz maintained that the organization was attempting to divert members’ attention back to the features that the organization had been known for in the past in order to remind them of what was important and central to the organization’s identity.

The inertia theory as discussed by Whetten (2007) proposes that people want to hold on to certain features of their organization’s identity. Sometimes it is obvious that changes might be beneficial to an organization. However, employees and/or stakeholders may resist these changes if they feel that the changes will make the organization unrecognizable. Whetten saw a positive side to inertia, in that organizations hold on to the core aspects of their identity over time and let go of those features that are more peripheral to their identity. The peripheral features that are added in response to external pressures do not replace the core or central features; they merely enhance them (Whetten, 2007). Whetten (2007) further suggested that more empirical research is needed to determine if the core features of an organization endure over time and how these features serve to distinguish the organization from others.

The study described in this research was conducted in a family-owned architectural/engineering firm that celebrated its 50-year anniversary in 2006. The founder, who now serves as the chairman of the board, is the only original leader who has remained consistently with the organization during this 50-year timeframe. The organization grew from a small land design and civil engineering firm to a major architectural/engineering firm. It acquired many smaller firms as well as several larger firms and in 2004 acquired a fairly large architectural firm. Other programs and services are offered by the organization that have supplemented its “core business.” The founder, CEO, and members of the organization have celebrated the features of the organization over time in a 25-year anniversary celebration, a 50-year anniversary celebration, annual awards for excellence, and other articles and publications. This study examined how the organizational identity features evolved over time as depicted in official histories and commemoration over the aforementioned 50-year time span through an analysis of founding documents, organizational histories, and anniversary commemorations. These sources were also compared with employees’ recall of significant events in the organization’s history.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine how identity features were commemorated over time and how these features were described in the official histories of the organization as well as recollections of significant events by members of the organization. This study analyzed organizational identity features, i.e., features that are core, distinctive, and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006), that serve to maximize the organization’s distinctiveness from other organizations over time (*self-*

*other comparison*), and that are referenced in *self-self* comparisons. This explanation of enduring organizational features is more clearly stated as those that constitute the most reliable means for organizations to distinguish themselves from similar others over time (Whetten, 2007).

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following overarching research question: How does the interpretation of an organization's identity change over time as depicted in the official histories and commemoration in a 50-year-old family-owned business?

To understand this process, several specific subquestions were addressed:

1. How are the CDE features recalled and interpreted in recollections of significant events as described by cohorts of employees in the organization?
2. How are the CDE features of the organization represented in the official histories of the organization?
3. How are the CDE features of the organization represented in the commemoration of significant events as part of the 25th and 50th anniversary celebrations?

A historical timeline of the organization is provided in Appendix A.

### **Significance of the Study**

Whetten (2007) suggested that more empirical research is needed to determine if the core features of an organization endure over time and how these features serve to distinguish the organization from others. This research furthers our understanding of how much an organization can or needs to embellish those features about itself that optimally

distinguish it from other like organizations. It furthers the understanding of organizational identity and how organizations continue to examine this issue throughout their life cycle.

Ravasi and Schultz (2006) also recommended more empirical research on the relationship between organizational identity and organizational culture. This study contributes to the research in that area, since history and commemoration are elements of organizational culture. The study also builds on other work (Casey, 1997; Cavanaugh & Casey, 2005; Byington, 2007) that has shown a recursive relationship between organizational memory and organizational identity. It further adds to the recent research of organizational identity evolution (Valdes, 2007; van Rekom & Whetten, 2007). Valdes' study highlighted how a 35-year-old university conformed to the identity requirements of its social category over the length of its existence, while at the same time trying to be distinct from other universities. Van Rekom and Whetten's (2007) study focused on Proctor and Gamble and is discussed further in chapter 2. Both studies show that the earlier in the organization's history that the CDE features are crystallized in conversations regarding critical decisions or turning points, the more likely those features will stay the same over time and continue to influence future decisions regarding the organization's identity (van Rekom & Whetten, 2007).

Another important aspect of this research is that it contributes to both the organizational identity literature and the literature on collective memory. This adds value because it provides empirical research about how history and commemoration relate to identity as well as adding to the theoretical base of organizational identity.

This study furthers the knowledge of how identity is formed by the stories that are told in the organization about its founding years and its history. Examining these stories

and the events that are commemorated helps to show the source of the organization's identity and how what was considered important to the organization was transmitted through the collective memory of those who worked there then as well as now. By putting organizational identity and how it is formed under a microscope and examining what is commemorated over a 50-year timeframe, this study reveals how the organization's identity has been interpreted since the time of its founding and the role that commemoration and history have played in this evolutionary process.

Casey and Olivera (2003) presented evidence that there is still fragmentation in the literature. Their manuscript encouraged more collaboration and integration among various fields. Cornelissen, Haslam, and Balmer (2007) made the same point about the need for cross-fertilization. They specifically stated the need for more empirical work that crosses the domains of social identity, organizational identity, and corporate identity instead of staying focused on one area alone. The authors believed that there are relationships among the concepts that can add to the conversation in several areas of research. As mentioned, this study crosses several domains and shows links between different literatures. This study crosses the domains of organizational identity, collective memory (specifically commemoration and history), and family-owned businesses, including information on founders. From a practical standpoint, founders and leaders in organizations may be able to apply some of the findings about how organizational identity is impacted by collective memory and the use of commemorative practices that celebrate core identity features. This information may be useful in terms of hiring and retention, storing collective memory, and balancing the use of this collective memory

when making decisions and setting strategic direction that impact the organization's identity and its future.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Two constructs were utilized in this study. The first is organizational identity, through the lens of Albert and Whetten's (1985) theory of organizational identity: that which is "central, distinctive, and temporally continuous" [now enduring] in an organization (p. 265). In addition, this study built on the construct of collective memory, specifically its elements of history and commemoration, as defined by Schwartz (2000).

Several researchers (Casey, 1997; Byington, 2007; Cavanaugh & Casey, 2005; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) have proposed that history is part of organizational culture and is linked with organizational identity. The sociological literature focuses on history and commemoration as components of collective memory and also links them with collective identity (Schwartz, 2000).

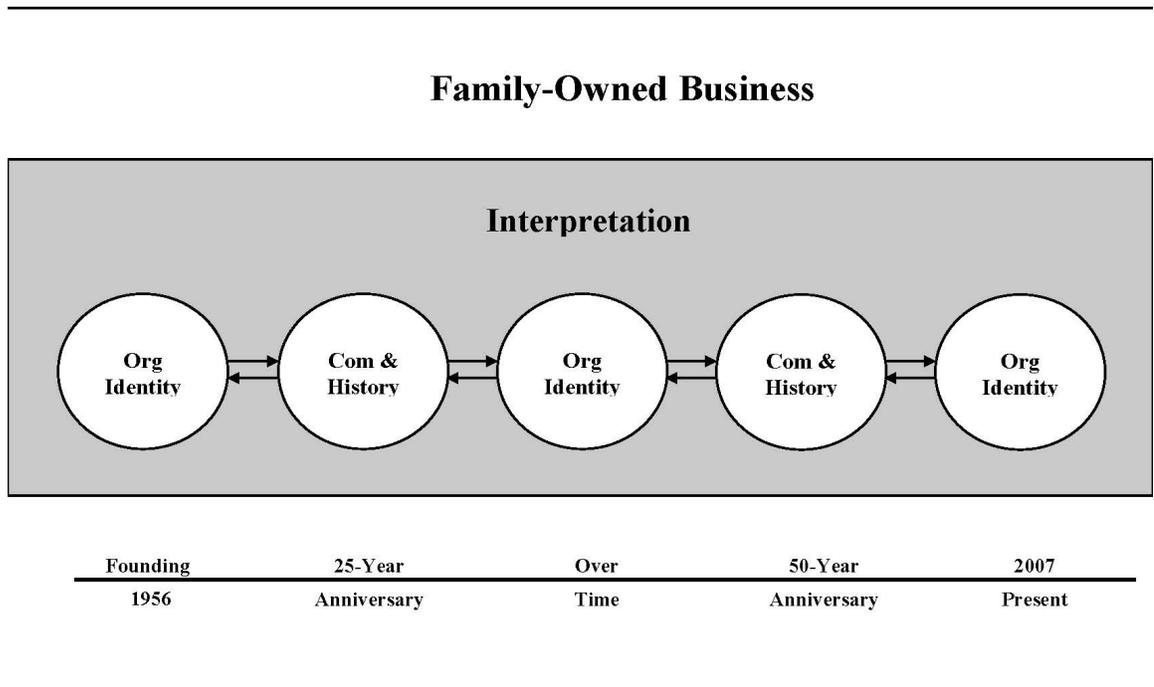
Organizations are consistently addressing the question of who they are now compared to who they were and who they want to be in the future (Whetten, 2007). Identity claims of an organization that are central and distinct should remain the same over time and should be evident through the organization's policies and practices (Whetten, 2007).

This view of organizational identity makes use of the social actor theory as opposed to the social constructionist view. The social actor view posits that the organization is a "social actor" with a social and legal status because the organization has a contract that defines the type of business that it is, which in turn defines its identity in the social arena (Whetten & Mackey, 2002). The social constructionist view presents

organizational identity as being constructed and influenced by its members on an ongoing basis (Corley et al., 2006).

When considering commemoration, it is important to observe which events have been celebrated and honored over the years to determine what is held most dear (Schwartz, 2000). Literature on both commemoration and collective memory is reviewed in chapter 2. Since a family-owned business is the context of the study, literature on family-owned businesses is also reviewed in that chapter.

Figure 1-1 represents the conceptual framework. With the family-owned business as the context of the study, it shows the temporal relationship of organizational identity, how it relates to history and commemoration, and how history and commemoration in turn impact organizational identity.



**Figure 1-1.** Conceptual framework.

## **Summary of the Methodology**

This case study was conducted in a local architectural/engineering firm that is family owned. The study was rooted in a naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). In essence the study supported the “subjective meaning of social action” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 244). A case study is a bounded system. It is bound by time and place and provides rich data about the events in the particular setting (Creswell, 1998).

The study was conducted at the organizational level of analysis using interviews, focus groups, observation, and documentation. A cohort approach to gathering the data was used, with cohorts defined by the decade when employees started to work for the organization (Ryder, 1965).

## **Delimitations of the Study**

- The perspectives gained from the interviews and focus groups were from selected members of the family, i.e., the founder and his oldest son, as well as from managers, employees, and the researcher-observer and were limited to a single organization.
- The researcher interviewed only those employees who were initially employed by Dewberry and Davis LLC, including those who joined offices later added to the company in Maryland, Florida, Louisiana, and elsewhere. The study excluded those who became Dewberry employees as part of an acquisition or merger.
- The 50-year time span of the organization was studied; thus the findings are limited by this temporality.
- Although other studies have been conducted on organizational identity and its recursive relationship with collective memory, this study focused on

organizational identity through the lens of Albert and Whetten (1985; Whetten, 2006). The study also examined organizational identity and how it is impacted by collective memory and the use of commemorative events. The findings were concentrated in these areas.

### **Limitations**

- Since this is a single case study the findings are not generalizable.
- As an employee of the organization, the researcher/observer could be seen as being biased by her relationship to the organization and to some of the people she knows and who she interviewed (Girden, 2001).
- Qualitative data analysis requires that certain structures be in place to ensure for sufficient objectivity and validity of the data collection and results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) particularly warned against the occurrence of observer bias in the case of longitudinal case studies.

### **Assumptions**

The assumptions related to this case represent a set of subjective choices rooted in the researcher's worldview, values, understandings, and purpose. These assumptions are as follows:

- Organizations can be defined as social actors.
- Organizations have a need to be similar to other organizations in their industry as well as to differentiate themselves from others so that they can show their unique value.

- Organizational identity claims can be analyzed over time to determine how much they stay the same (continuity).
- Founders and other organizational members have memories of the organization's identity that can serve as a valuable source of information.
- Founders have power over how the organization's history is written and how events are commemorated.
- Commemorative events influence the way organizational members perceive the organization's history and identity.
- The stories that are told about an organization are remembered even though the people telling the stories may not have been present when the events took place.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Key terms that are included from the literature are provided here in alphabetical order to clarify their meaning and the way they are being used in this study.

*Cohort*: People who share a set of experiences in history (Ryder, 1965).

*Collective memory*: "A representation of the past embodied in both historical evidence and commemorative symbolism" (Schwartz, 2000, p. 9). "Collective memory refers simultaneously to what is in the minds of individuals and to emergent conceptions of the past crystallized into symbolic structures" (Schwartz, 2000, p. 8).

*Commemoration*: One of the ways that society celebrates or recognizes the memory of an event (Schwartz, 2000).

*Culture*: "A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well

enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 1992, p. 12).

*Founder:* An individual who either by himself or herself or in concert with others starts a new company from scratch (Company Crafters, 2006).

*History:* The representation of past events (Schwartz, 2000).

*Organic growth:* Growth that satisfies the criteria for entrepreneurship, meaning “new economic activity.” A firm that grows by organic growth does so by expanding in new markets or services as opposed to growing through acquisitions (Hitt, Ireland, & Sexton, 2002, p. 339).

*Organizational identity:* “That which distinguishes the organization on the basis of something important and essential” (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 2).

*Organizational identity claims:* “Those attributes of an organization that qualify as central or core features, that are also used by members of an organization to distinguish it from similar organizations as a unique social entity, and which endure or persist over time and space” (Whetten, 2007, p. 1).

*Organizational identity processes:* The means by which an organization compares itself to other organizations and how it reflects on these comparisons over time (Albert, 1977).

*Organizational memory:* Knowledge that is preserved by the organization and is encoded into the organization’s policies, procedures, language, and culture (Walsh & Ungson, 1991).

*Principle*: 1. a. A comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine, or assumption. b. A rule or code of conduct. (Merriam-Webster Online, 2009).

*Values*: “The social principles, goals, and standards held within a culture to have intrinsic worth. They define what members of an organization care about”(Hatch, 1997, p. 214).

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

I have a confession to make. I've spent every minute of the last 50 years with this firm, but I am as awed as anyone by what we've accomplished. —Sidney Dewberry, founder and chairman of the board (Dewberry & Brown, 2006, p. 3)

This chapter presents a review of the primary literature on organizational identity. In addition, it covers the relevant work on collective memory, with a focus on history and commemoration, and presents the theoretical lens for this study on identity and memory in a family-owned business environment. Since this study draws on the collective memory of the organization's founder as well as other leaders and members, these topics are important to setting the context of the particular case study in focus. Other aspects of collective memory that are discussed are cohort groups and their role in collective memory and particularly the role of commemorations of past events and their relationship to organizational identity and its interpretation. A summary of the literature and definitions of family-owned businesses and the influence of the founder on the identity of the organization are also provided.

Initially I used the ProQuest ABI/Inform Research database to conduct research in each of the academic areas of literature. I asked for help from staff in the library at George Washington University when I had a difficult time finding a source. One of the library staff shared with me that he often found articles by searching on the search engine, Google. Afterward I began to search in Google for the type of scholarly articles I was hoping to find. I searched for things by the topics of organizational identity, collective memory, commemoration, and history. I also conducted searches of articles by author when I had the particular author's name or the name of the article but needed a

copy for my use. Google would take me directly to the academic publishing sites where I could order articles or preview articles for a limited period of time. I searched for articles primarily from the 1980s to 2008 timeframe.

The Family Firm Institute was a helpful source of information for the family business information. In reading articles by others I would refer to their bibliographies when the sources were also important to my research. I searched for dissertations on the same topics and found valuable sources by doing so. I also found Amazon.com to be a good source of books by known authors, and I was able to order them online and receive them very quickly. Colleagues and professors who had worked on similar topics also sent me relevant articles and loaned books to me on several occasions.

### **Organizational Identity**

This section provides some background on individual identity and its importance in shaping the concept of organizational identity. Organizational identity theory is built on individual identity theory. Erickson (1968) discussed identity as a concept that needs to remain consistent over time. He discussed the fact that the distress of many army personnel after World War II was probably caused by the loss of continuity in their lives after the war was over. Soldiers came home to find that their lives were nothing like they had been before they left, and they felt a loss of identity. Organizational identity theory involves a similar concept and process.

Albert and Whetten (1985) also saw this temporal aspect as being essential to organizational identity. They defined organizational identity as that “which distinguishes the organization on the basis of something important and essential” (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 26). They proposed certain factors that might impact an organization’s identity at

different times in its life cycle, i.e., when the organization is formed; when it loses a sustaining element such as its founder; when its mission changes; when it undergoes extremely rapid growth; when there is an acquisition, merger, or hostile takeover; and when it experiences retrenchment. Albert and Whetten (1985) also proposed a three-criteria definition of identity:

1. Claimed central character: the features that are somehow seen as the essence of the organization
2. Claimed distinctiveness: the features that distinguish the organization from others with which it may be compared
3. Claimed temporal continuity: features that exhibit some degree of sameness or continuity over time (pp. 264-265)

Hatch (1997) defined organizational identity as “members’ experiences of and beliefs about the organization as a whole” (p. 257). Hatch saw identity as being self-focused and distinguishable from another frequently used term, organizational image. She defined organizational image as impressions of the organization that are formed by others. Image is seen to be the impression that an organization makes on its external audiences.

In tune with the idea of organizational identity and image, some firms focus on elements of their physical appearance to influence how others see them. Architectural features, corporate logos, uniforms, annual reports, and company brochures are designed to influence people in regard to the organization’s identity and image. There is a sense that these elements influence an organization’s credibility and reinforce its strategic vision (Hatch, 1997).

Some organizations, such as not-for-profits, have the added complexity of a hybrid identity, which can pose conflicts of interest between the organization's purpose and what others feel is an appropriate use of funds, for example (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997). Family-owned businesses are another example of hybrid organizations. The family-owned business is special because the family members can draw from their shared history, yet the role of the chairman of the board is different when he or she is sitting at the board table with other family members (Gersick, Davis, Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997). Essentially, it is more complex when family relationships take on the dual role of working together in a family-owned business.

Another layer of identity complexity involves organizations with multiple identities. Foreman and Whetten (2002) "conducted a survey of members of rural cooperatives 'a prototypical hybrid identity organizational form' which has elements of both 'business and family' identities. Results of their analyses show that organizational identity congruence has a significant effect on member commitment" (p. 618). Corley and Gioia (2004) examined a situation in which a company was involved in the spin-off of a corporate entity from its parent. The organization was becoming an independent organization, "seeking its own survival, growth and success." In this type of situation, the question of "who are we" becomes crucial. "Identity ambiguity implies multiple possible interpretations about which core features should define the changed organization, so tensions can accompany the process of deciding which interpretations will prevail in shaping the company's future image" (p. 173). Another study examined how an organization that has been acquired fights to keep its former identity even after it no longer exists. In this context employees are faced with the question of holding on to "who

we were as an organization.” This research offered a different perspective since most studies are conducted on intact organizations and not on dealing with the identity questions of the firm that has been acquired and is no longer the same firm. It also discusses how former members manage to keep what is referred to as the “legacy organizational identity” intact (Walsh & Glynn, 2008).

When looking at identity from the individual and organizational levels of analysis, changes brought on by mergers and acquisitions can also pose identity issues for employees and the organization (Millward & Kyriakidou, 2004). Millward and Kyriakidou maintained that facilitating people’s individual careers to ensure that they are growing and developing within an organization can help promote less resistance to the changes in the new identity of the organization. In this sense the organizational interests coincide with the individual interests because the individual does not feel as threatened by the changes the organization has made (Dutton et al., as cited by Millward & Kyriakidou, 2004).

Elstak and Van Riel (2005) took a closer look at collective organizational identity. They discussed two common premises: (1) that a high degree of identification with the organization constrains organizational identity change because members who strongly identify with the organization’s current identity will not be open to change in the organization’s identity and will resist it; and (2) that those members who have a low degree of identification with the organization will be more receptive to changes in organizational identity and will enable a collective change effort because they are not as attached to the “old” organizational identity. Elstak and Van Riel found that the second premise was not true. They determined that members who do not feel connected to the

organization's identity will still be unwilling to change because they will not support anything that is seen as a collective effort. Also, they mentioned a third classification of members: those members who have a somewhat ambivalent identification are seen to be in an apathetic state. The authors maintained that overall in the identity studies, the portrayal of identity is seen as an impediment to change. They presented the view that identity and identification cannot be easily separated if a strong, coherent organization is desired. Something else of interest from the employee perspective of organizational identity is that some identity features that organizational members see as unique to their organization may not in fact be that unique (Martin, Felman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983). However, members need to believe that these features make their organization distinct from other organizations in order to be willing to promote them as part of the identity (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994).

In a more recent paper, Whetten (2006) reiterated that "organizations are best known by their deepest commitments—what they repeatedly commit to be, over time and across circumstances" (p. 10). Whetten maintained that in order to meet the enduring validity standard, the legitimate identity claims are usually those organizational elements that have withstood the test of time. Whetten further maintained that "organizations intentionally perpetuate their central and distinguishing features preserving for tomorrow what has made them what they are today" (p. 11). Gagliardi (1986) argued that the main strategy of the organization seems to be focused on working to maintain its identity and that this is especially true when the organization is threatened by significant change.

### *The Debate About Organizational Identity*

In their article “Identity Dialogues,” Pratt and Foreman (2000) summarized highlights of six articles that were written on a special forum on identity. They discussed the controversy that exists about organizational identity and whether it is enduring, as Albert and Whetten (1985) described it, or evolving and adapting to the changing needs of the organization, as others such as Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (2000) described it. Gioia et al. have stated that identity is fluid and unstable since it adapts to the changing external environment to which organizations are subjected. Pratt and Foreman (2000) discussed what they see as the “beauty that such theoretical diversity adds to our understanding of identity, as well as the barriers it causes to development in this area.” Gioia et al. (2000) also maintained that the way the organization is portrayed to its external audience is seen as image, not as identity.

In most of the articles in the forum on identity, the authors also discussed the concept of multiple identities that arise from workgroups, social memberships, and external stakeholders. There is an assumption that managing these multiple identities is the responsibility of the top management of the organization. It is felt that top management is responsible for shaping the organization’s identity.

There was discussion about whether identity can be enduring if it can change and also whether or not the idea of identity being central is key since the organization can change its mission. Such a change does not occur in all organizations, however, so one of the points the authors made is that identity does not necessarily always have to be central, distinct, and enduring (as Albert and Whetten [1985] portrayed it), just as it does not always need to be adaptive or emergent, as Gioia et al. and others portrayed it. Both types

of identity in organizations can occur depending on what the organization needs to do to remain successful in the marketplace.

Gioia et al. (2000) also suggested that the organizational identity field needs to become more comfortable talking about organizational identity without being so dependent on using individual identity as its foundation. They also believed that we need to gain a better understanding of the impact that the external audience plays on the substance of the organization's identity. In a later article, van Rekom, Corley, and Ravasi (2008) summarized key theories in several papers on organizational identity to illustrate how the identity field has gone from discussing what identity is to looking at how identity can be a useful concept for managers making critical organizational decisions that can be guided by their firm's identity and values. Elstak (2008, p. 280) concluded "that during times of threat or change, organizational members are more concerned about the extent to which their perceptions are resonated in the claims and desires of management than about the attractiveness of their perceived organizational identity."

In looking at *The Dark Side of Organizational Identity*, Jeyavelu (2007) thought it was important to recognize the possible negative implications of such strong organizational identity focus. He posed four possible themes: "obsessive integration," "obsessive differentiation," "the merging of individual-organization identities," and the "vicious cycle of organizational identity, projected image, and reputation." He described obsessive integration as an obsession with having an organizational identity that everyone in the company must agree on. He portrayed the negative aspects of this as having a single view that could lead to people not feeling free to express opposite views, lack of innovation and entrepreneurialism, group think, etc. He defined obsessive differentiation

as the need to consistently portray the company as being different than other firms. He noted that negative aspects of this need for differentiation could lead to a waste of resources when too much time was spent on trying to make the company distinct. He also cited the potential to become inefficient or ineffective while trying to create new processes instead of using those already determined to be best practices. The merging of individual-organizational identities occurs when the individual's identity becomes too closely tied to the organization's identity. Jeyavelu maintained that this could be emotionally, psychologically, and socially dysfunctional because the individual's identity loses strength and gets lost in the organization. In regard to the cycle of reputation, identity, and image, he said, "The reputation management becomes a vicious cycle if the identity expression and projected image are not congruous" (p. 89). He cited situations where companies maintain misrepresentation about their image (such as Enron) to protect their reputation and where an obsessive focus on image seemed to be the sole purpose of existence.

#### *Summarizing the Importance of Organizational Identity*

In summary, the organizational identity literature seems to emphasize that organizational identity is important to employees. Organizations need to be more aware of the identity that is being perceived by their employees in order to capitalize on its benefits in terms of employee commitment and retention as well as its relationship to change. Especially when undergoing an acquisition, leaders need to be aware of the impact on employees in terms of the way they perceive the organization's identity.

If the organization's identity appears to be threatened, those employees who identify strongly with the organization will want to protect it. If the change will enhance

the organization's distinctness, they will be more likely to see the change as successful. Communication from the founder during this period about the organization's purpose and mission is very important in shaping how employees view the organization's identity. In Casey's (1997) study, she found that the founders and key staff members had been a "continuous link" to the organization's identity as well as the organizational schemata and scripts that were present in the organizational memory. This study examined organizational identity through the lens of Albert and Whetten (1985) and Whetten (2006, 2007).

### **Collective Memory**

According to Schwartz (2000), "Collective memory refers simultaneously to what is in the minds of individuals and to emergent conceptions of the past crystallized into symbolic structures" (p. 8). Halbwachs (1992, p. 22) believed that an individual at times needs to appeal to other people and their memories of past events in order to tap into his or her own recollections. Durkheim's (1982) theories in this area set the stage for looking at how individuals engage in cognitive processes and how groups therefore develop a collective conscience. The collective conscience can best be equated to the concept of organizational memory.

Research (Clark, 1972; Casey, 1997) showed that founders have a tremendous impact on the organization they create from the time of founding, well into its future and ultimately on its history and memory. This influence is apparent even with the departure of the founder and extends to shaping the organizational culture, its mission, and its strategic focus (Clark, 1972). One aspect of culture, collective memory is also impacted by this founding influence (Clark, 1972). The stories that are told and passed on to

employees who join an organization after the founding years, as well as the events and company characteristics that are commemorated, are important to creating a shared history of why the organization was founded and why its mission is important. These narratives and stories or organizational sagas have a way of connecting people to their organizations (Clark, 1972). Since founders have first-hand knowledge of the creation of the organization, they have a particular passion for retelling this story. It would also seem that they have a vested interest in having people understand the passion they had in starting the business, as well as some of the struggles they have had over the years to keep it going.

Casey (1997) conducted research on the content of the structure of collective memory. She described the processes of formation, transmittal, and retrieval of this memory. Her study revealed that collective memory is an integral part of how knowledge is created in the organization and that the memory is influenced by the values, mission, and identity of the organization (Casey, 1997).

### *Cohort Groups*

This section discusses the phenomenon of cohort groups and how groups of people at different ages in their lives or from different time periods of joining an organization contribute to the collective memory of those who come after them.

Ryder (1965) professed that the infusion of new cohorts may pose a threat to stability, but they also provide the opportunity for social transformation. Each birth cohort acquires an understanding and continuity from its own distinct development. Ryder examined the differences between what is distinguishable about an individual's life and the interdependence of the life cycles of individuals collectively in society. He

believed that it is possible to maximize the individual distinctiveness of a particular cohort to create social change. In agreement with Ryder (1965), Riggs and Turner (2000) found that certain generations of cohorts have distinctions from others. They studied an elite cohort of Australian baby boomers who proved to be optimists when surveyed about their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their quality of life. Lawrence (2002) found that cohort groups in adult and higher education programs provide the skills needed to build and maintain learning communities that are needed for healthy and sustainable societies.

Schuman and Rodgers (2004) studied cohort groups, how collective memories are changed and new events occur, and whether collective memories remain stable during critical times in people's lives, i.e., adolescence and early adulthood. They found that it is not surprising that events fade from the collective memory once certain cohort groups disappear and new events continue to occur. They also found "that collective memories of old events can be saved from extinction, at least temporarily, by new occurrences that bring them to mind" (p. 19). Mannheim (1952), on the other hand, found that it was important for a cohort to have personally experienced an event. He felt that people are more likely to recall an event that happened during their lifetime than one before. Halbwachs (1992) also believed in the importance of one's direct experience.

In another study, Schuman and Corning (2006) found that in looking at two types of memory, recall and recognition, it helped to position past studies on cohort recall and its impact on collective memory. These studies show that cohort groups from a particular generation or time period remember things similarly and help to sustain that memory for future generations. People in the same cohort group form a bond when they go through similar experiences together, i.e., participating in classes together (Lawrence, 2002). It

seems it would hold true that this same type of bond would exist when people start to work in a particular organization during the same time period. Their experiences of the organization and the time period in which they join would be similar to those who pass through certain experiences in history together, i.e., the assassination of President Kennedy, the Viet Nam War, and other events (Schuman & Rodgers, 2004).

Cavanaugh and Casey (2005) discussed how Cavanaugh's study extended the use of cohort groups to the organizational setting. Cavanaugh explored cohorts who enter an organization during different time intervals. Her study focused on understanding how the organization's collective memory contributes to the development of an organization's identity and vice versa. Cavanaugh gathered information from cohort focus groups (groups that had entered the organization during different time periods) and individual senior management interviews. The comments and stories gathered from the interviews were analyzed for themes that showed how the memories impacted the characteristics that employees viewed as being relevant to their organization's identity. The findings show that even though members of the cohorts that came later to the organization had no specific memories of the founding years, the characteristics of the organization's identity remained central, distinctive, and enduring for all those who participated in the study. It is my assumption that examining the collective memory of the cohort groups in this study would also prove valuable to understanding how collective memory is formed, especially through the use of commemoration and commemorative events, and to determining how that has affected the organization's identity over time. The next section emphasizes the impact of commemorations on collective memory.

### *Commemorations*

“Students of collective memory have shifted their attention from the historian’s traditional preoccupation with the reconstruction of the past to exploration of how the past is actually remembered and understood by members of a certain group” (Zerubavel, 1994, p. 72). Adamczyk (2002) examined the traditions around the Thanksgiving holiday and showed that there are other elements of tradition that have no connection to the original occasion, i.e., Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. Adamczyk’s (2002) study showed that commemorations can sometimes change the way events are seen over a period of time in history. Schwartz (2000) pointed out that changing the dates of the commemorations of Presidents Lincoln and Washington’s birthdays has diminished the importance of these two presidents in our current society. He reflected that America’s great presidents will continue to be remembered but said it will depend on “the tone and texture of their remembrance” (p. 196).

According to Peri (1997), one of the major factors in reestablishing social integration during the week following Prime Minister Rabin’s assassination was the published collective biography of Rabin. This biography serves as a commemoration of Rabin and represents the collective identity of the Israeli society. Thus, collective memory serves to bring a sense of unity to a group as remembrances are shared and interactively integrated in one way or another (Schuman & Scott, 1989).

Olick (2005) talked about the struggle that the Germans had to rebuild their collective identity after World War II. At one point a clergyman bemoaned the fact that it was difficult to move on to build a new future because no one would let them forget the past and what had been done. Olick maintained that memory is “never unitary” and that

the past is not only the province of historians but provides a means for ordinary people to understand the past.

Those who have access to the memories have a certain degree of power in the ongoing construction of collective identity (Gongaware, 2003). Collective memory creation develops collective memories of recent activities by bringing people up to speed and providing them with details of the memory's object of reference. Collective memory maintenance allows memories of the past to remain part of the collective memory. The concept of narrative commemorations helps identify the links to the past that are exchanged in the everyday actions of group members (Gongaware, 2003).

Commemorations are one of the ways that society celebrates or recognizes such events. "Commemoration mobilizes symbols to awaken ideas and feeling about the past. . . . Commemoration makes society conscious of itself as it affirms its members' mutual affinity and identity" (Schwartz, 2000, pp. 9-10).

Halbwachs (1992) suggested that through participation in these types of commemorative meetings, we recreate memories of the past that would otherwise disappear. Thus, it seems it would follow that these types of commemorative meetings in organizations help to maintain the organization's history and help newcomers understand the past upon which the organization is founded.

### *History*

Schwartz (2000) maintained that commemoration and history perform different roles but are very interdependent. He said that we confuse the two by evaluating them against each other. He described history as reflecting the ideal that commemoration celebrates and said that commemoration is taken from past knowledge. He further said

that historians often become interested in facets of history because of the things that they have seen commemorated.

Halbwachs (1992) saw history as being objective and full of facts, while Schwartz (2000) saw it as being partially consistent since he believed that what is preserved through history is how we make sense of the present. Schwartz (2000) gave an example of how the Catholic Church has preserved continuity of images but has done so selectively, so that the continuity is selective. Terdiman observed, “Since the past frames present existence, the complete detachment of the past and present is theoretically as well as empirically impossible” (1993, p. 3). Connerton (1989, p. 1) agreed, saying, “All beginnings contain an element of recollection. . . . More fundamentally, it is that in all modes of experience we always base our particular experiences on a prior context in order to ensure that they are intelligible at all.”

Wertsch (2002) wrote about the power of “textual mediation” and how students for years have learned about World War II through the variations in writing about it depending on which country they live in and who is writing the text. He told an interesting story of an American who met a Russian boy and was both astounded and dismayed by the boy’s belief about the role that Americans played in the war. Wertsch pointed out that this happens frequently when “we produce collective memory accounts of the past—especially the past that has occurred before our lifetime . . . and that is listening to stories or reading textual information and taking it as truth” (pp. 6-7). He then pointed out how Americans have learned to view their role in World War II by reading books and watching movies that give a whole different perspective, which is the American perspective. Wertsch further iterated that “collective memory can mean any

number of things depending on the conversation in which it is embedded” (2002, pp. 6-7).

In the organizational context, the organization’s history is important to its present. Ravasi and Schultz (2006) found that the corporate history of the firms being studied was critical to their understanding of the evolution of the organizations’ identity. Just as no two individuals have the same history, no two organizations have the same history. Therefore, the organization’s history is part of what makes it unique or distinctive from other organizations.

Historical accounts and examples from Proctor & Gamble show that there is a reciprocal relationship between what was central and enduring about the organizational features in the earlier years of the organization and what is predictable about the organization’s central and enduring features today. These historical accounts show that “identity-manifesting choices” (van Rekom & Whetten, 2007, p. 11) needed to be made about the organization, and the choices usually reflected the organization’s core values and priorities. Therefore, the history and retelling of these stories confirm for the firm’s members “how we became who we are today” (van Rekom & Whetten, 2007, p. 11).

### **Family-Owned Businesses**

The lifespan of the family business averages 24 years (Dyer, 1986). Only a small percentage of all startup businesses last more than 5 years (Winter, Fitzgerald, Heck, Haynes, & Danes, 1998). Approximately one-third of family businesses move successfully into the next generation, and a small percentage, an estimated 13%, transition successfully to the third generation (Ward, 1988). Therefore, those family

businesses that are successful are worth studying to see what types of elements make them unique, particularly in relationship to organizational memory and identity.

In America, family businesses are an integral part of the economic and social systems in society (Finelli, 2006). They are significant not only because they are in abundance, but also because they affect the economic and social stability of the United States, as well as the stability of the family and quality of life among individuals involved in family firms. Up to 80% to 90% of all businesses in North America are family owned.

In the United States, it is estimated that family businesses account for as much as 78% of all new jobs created (Shanker & Astrachan, 1996), 62% of employment, and 64% of the gross domestic product (Astrachan & Shanker, 2003). Young family firms and old family firms (50-year-old threshold) outperform nonfamily firms (Family Firm Institute, 2005).

Finelli's 2006 study on succession in family-owned businesses noted that family businesses are very concerned about succession planning. The study further indicated that family businesses have a more complicated situation to deal with since succession is usually planned for family members in some capacity, if not in an active position in the organization at least with a presence on the board of directors. According to Aronoff (1998), "Family business succession seemed the focus of everyone purporting to work with family firms." Of CEOs aged 61 or older and due to retire in the next 5 years, 55% have not yet chosen their replacement (Family Firm Institute, 2005).

A consistent family business definition would be beneficial and would provide a stronger conceptual framework for use in the field. It would also allow for comparative studies and greater reliability. Heck and Trent (1999) maintained that diversity among

definitions increases flexibility in measuring variations in family businesses and adds validity to the research.

In addition to the large number of family businesses, there is also a wide array of family-owned businesses in the United States. A family business may be in its infancy or hundreds of years old. Ownership may be privately held, publicly traded, or a combination. Governance may reside in a single person, a partnership, a board of directors, or shareholders. The family business leader may or may not have intent to transfer the business to the next generation. Of primary importance among family firms is not only transferring their financial wealth but also transferring their values surrounding their wealth to subsequent generations. These values include encouraging children to earn their own money, philanthropy, charitable giving, and volunteering (Family Firm Institute, 2005). One-third of the largest publicly held corporations in the United States are family businesses (Shanker & Astrachan, 1996). Gersick et al. (1997) maintained that over half of the companies in the United States are family owned.

In defining family businesses, Westhead and Cowling (1998) summarized seven variables that researchers may or may not use when defining a firm as a family business:

1. Self-perception as a family business.
2. Members of the largest single family group own more than 50 percent of stock.
3. A combination of the previous two categories.
4. A combination of the first two categories plus the chief executive is from the owning largest family group.
5. All the preceding categories plus more than 51 percent of the management team belongs to the largest single family group.
6. The firm is owned by second-generation (or later) family members, with one or more of the management team from the largest family group, plus categories one through four above.
7. Fifty-one percent of the management team is from the largest family group plus all of the previous criteria of self-perception as a family business, more than 50 percent of voting shares owned by largest family group, chief

executive is from the largest owning family group, and the firm is owned by second generation or later family members. (Westhead & Cowling, 1998, p. 29-33)

Family businesses may have family councils or boards of directors. These may have either formal or advisory leadership authority. As the organization grows, councils and boards are more likely to be involved in the leadership of family firms (Ward, 1988). Lansberg (as cited by Troyer, 2000) believed that family-owned businesses need to have a “real board.” He contended that a “real board” needs to have at least three outside family members. Gersick et al. (1997) believed that a board should have a balance of nonfamily, nonexecutive members “to develop policies that protect the interests of the business, guard it from the excesses of family politicking, and treat the family members fairly” (p. 1).

For the purpose of this study, the definition of a family-owned business includes the first two criteria suggested by Westhead and Cowling (1998). These criteria are (1) a self-perception of the firm being a family-owned firm and (2) members of the family have more than 50% ownership. For this study, an additional criterion was whether or not the employees of the organization perceived the business as family owned. According to Hatch (1997), “All cultures, including families and organizations, require cooperative effort and mutual self-definition that we say are socially constructed. Socially constructed entities exist only so long as their members regard them as existing and behave accordingly” (p. 218). This is an important element, because if employees perceive the business to be family owned, there must be a strong indication based on the way that the business is run that causes this perception to exist. If the family is still very involved in

certain decisions that are made and employees know this is true, then the family presence is a strong element of the culture and environment.

The influence of the founder can have a significant impact on the culture of the organization and the values that are communicated on a day-to-day basis. In the case study in question, the family's presence as owners of the firm was very strong. There was frequent reference to the owners and how they would perceive or respond to certain decisions. The next section expands on this concept in more detail.

### *Founders and Storytelling*

Clark's (1972) study of organizational sagas focused on the case studies of three colleges and their histories, showing how the saga or story created by the students, faculty, and alumni had been created over the years and had become a foundation for the creation of bonds and loyalty that gave the organizations a competitive edge in recruiting and retaining employees. Pettigrew (1979) also used a longitudinal case study to examine dramas that had played out over the years in a private British boarding school. Both studies examined the influence of the founder on the culture. Pettigrew found that purpose, commitment, and order were created by the feelings and actions of the founder and through the beliefs, language, rituals, etc., that were played out day to day. He looked at critical incidents over time in the history of the organization that he considered to be "social dramas," i.e., the retirement of three headmasters, including the initial retirement of the founder who was considered to be a strong and idiosyncratic personality. Pettigrew made the point that when an organization is new, the employees are dependent on the founder to instill motivation towards his or her vision.

This notion was also examined in the work of Krackhardt and Kilduff (1990). They maintained that “institutionalized traditions, set in place by the organization’s founders, shape and are shaped by emergent beliefs and actions” (p. 143). Their study showed that the founder and current president’s guiding influence set the atmosphere in the organization (which was their research site) to be informal and friendly, yet one of the senior managers was attempting to create a more rules-based culture, which created tension. They also found that when coworkers agreed on the cultural norms of the organization, they were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs.

Findings from a study conducted on leadership in family-owned businesses by Pratt (2001) indicated “that leadership lessons, couched in values, arise out of stories. The findings from these stories emphasized values of persistence, hard work, and sacrifice. Stories told by founders of family businesses also illustrate that leadership includes focus on vision and values” (p. 91). Stories help people to learn and remember (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Stories can be powerful mechanisms for creating or sustaining corporate culture and change (Tichy, 1997). Shared storytelling and collective learning illustrate the potential and the challenges of organizational and social change (Boyce & Franklin, 1996; Gongaware, 2003). Gabriel (2000) examined which events in an organization’s history generate stories and which ones fail to do so. This is interesting because it shows which shared experiences are seen as meaningful to the members, something that they want to pass on and make part of the collective memories of the organization. Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayy, and Sanders (1990) also discussed the influence of the organization’s founders. They said that the U.S. management literature rarely differentiates between the values of the founder and the values of the employee population at large.

Whetten (2006) asserted that if values are part of the identifying features of the organization, they play a role in what is central, distinct, and enduring about the organization's identity. Clark (1972) maintained that the culture that is created by the founder becomes the organization's identity to potential employees, customers, and others outside and inside the organization. Managers play a large role in shaping the culture of the organization, and employees from various subcultures also play a significant role. If the founder or owner does not communicate his values consistently throughout the organization, they may not be uniformly accepted by employees.

For these reasons, it is good for managers to be aware of the symbols and elements of the culture that form the organization's identity for those inside and outside the organization. Employees who have a strong connection to the identity of the organization are more likely to feel good about the organization if the organization's identity is seen in a positive way by others outside the organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Dutton and Dukerich's (1991) findings concluded that an organization's image and identity impact the interpretation and action of those within the organization over time. They further linked the constructs of organizational identity and image to ideas about how an organization adapts over time. Employees will observe the direction that the founder takes the organization in terms of its vision and mission, and this will impact their perception of the company's identity as it evolves or as it stays the same.

Chapter 2 has presented some of the literature about individual identity, organizational identity, cohort groups, and the use of commemoration in shaping organizational memory. It has also provided research and information about family-

owned businesses and the influence of the founder on the organization's culture and values. Chapter 3 details the methodology used in this study.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **METHODOLOGY**

We are not the type to forget “who brought us to the dance.” We are loyal like that. So, no matter how long this story of our company goes on, every time it is told, it will be with thanks first to our clients. —Barry K. Dewberry, past CEO and current vice chairman of the board (Dewberry & Brown, 2006, p. 93)

This chapter describes the methodology for this case study. It includes an overview of the research design, a description of the research site, and an explanation of the data collection methods and data analysis methods. Finally, it discusses issues related to trustworthiness and ethics.

#### **Research Design**

This research study used a qualitative case-study research methodology to examine the relationship between organizational identity and collective memory. Patton (2002) suggested that the case study approach to qualitative analysis consists of a special way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data, which is seen to be more of a process. The purpose of a case study is to collect systematic, in-depth information about each specific case. The analysis that is conducted results in a specific product, which is the case study. Therefore, Patton saw the case study as the process of analysis or the product of analysis or both.

The purpose of this case study was to collect data in a specific way to study a specific case to examine how the phenomenon of organizational identity was impacted by collective memory, particularly the use of commemoration in an organization’s history. I decided to conduct an in-depth case study to gather rich data about the organization in question. I began by asking people to share their earliest memories of the founding years

of the organization as well as the stories that they relay to new employees of the firm. I also asked questions to gather information about which aspects of the organization's identity have remained the same over time. The questions were therefore seen as more of a guide to a conversation than as a formal survey (Kruse, 2002).

Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in depth. Sampling in qualitative research involves two actions. First, the researcher needs to set boundaries: to define aspects of the case that can be studied within the time limits and other resources available. Second, he or she must create a framework to help uncover, confirm, or qualify the basic processes or constructs that undergird the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Creswell (1998) defined a case study as

an exploration of a "bounded system" or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. This **bounded system** is bounded by time and place, and it is the **case** being studied—a program, an event, an activity, or individuals. (p. 61)

Creswell (1998) said that a case study might be used because a particular case is unique or because the issue is of particular interest. Several aspects of the case studied here were unique, and in addition useful information was readily available for analysis. The organization celebrated its 50-year anniversary in 2006, and there was a great deal of commemoration and celebration to mark this significant milestone in the company's history. Other types of commemorative activities were conducted at the 25-year anniversary. Documentation was available on those activities in the company archives.

Patton (2002) contended that even if you are working on a single case study, you will end up with stories of many smaller cases, such as specific individuals, units in an

organization, or individual families. He said that smaller incidents will also become part of the larger case that is being studied. In essence, there can be multiple layers to a case study. In this sense, a case study could be conducted with a holistic approach, which would analyze the entire case, versus an embedded approach, which would examine only a specific entity of the case in detail (Yin, 1989).

Stake (1978) said that case studies may not be as useful when trying to generalize the findings you have obtained, because they are focused on a specific entity. On the other hand, he agreed with the notion that Creswell put forth about case studies often being the preferred method of research because they might resonate with the readers' experience in a manner that is more personal than other research methods. In this sense, he felt that case studies can be a powerful means of sharing ordinary personal stories.

### **Site Selection**

The site for this study was a family-owned architectural/engineering firm in Northern Virginia that had recently celebrated its 50th year in business. The firm was in transition and had experienced growth in terms of acquisitions and profit over the past 5 years. Its sales revenues had increased by more than 11%, over that 5-year time span, which was better than the industry average. In addition, it had recently opened three new offices as a result of expanded work in those geographic areas. The organization was considered to be in both an expansion phase, with multiple product or business lines, as well as a mature or stable phase in terms of having a stable customer base, an established senior management team, and well-established organizational routines. There was much discussion in the organization about "who we are today" compared to "who we were" at the founding and, more importantly, how we want to be seen in the future. According to

Whetten (2007), this is the essence of the organizational identity challenges that face most organizations today.

### *Description of the Research Site*

The organization is a 1,955-person professional services firm operating nationally. It has 34 offices in 17 states and provides services in program management, planning, engineering, architecture, surveying, geographic information services, disaster recovery, and the environmental sciences. Clients include government agencies at all levels, corporations, real estate developers, colleges and universities, school districts, and other commercial and institutional organizations.

A privately held firm, it was established as a small land design and surveying practice in 1956 in Arlington, Virginia. Over time, the firm expanded upon its civil engineering and surveying expertise and added offices. In its 53rd year, it continues to expand and diversify. Although the company has grown and changed, specific elements have been maintained over the years to continue its reputation as a leading land development services firm. Also, in the early years, the firm was primarily located and known in Virginia. The firm now has offices across the country. The founder has remained very active throughout the organization's history.

### *Gaining Access*

When I had been an employee of the organization for 8 months, I approached the owners and the CEO about conducting the study. I prepared an executive summary to explain how the data would be collected and used. I mentioned that the firm's name could be kept confidential, that people would be participating voluntarily, and that the

information they shared would be anonymous. I clarified that the preparation, data analysis, and other work regarding this study would be conducted outside of normal working hours to the best of my ability. I already had the support of my manager and soon received the support of the CEO as well; he felt the study would be of benefit to me and to the organization. The owner, Mr. Dewberry, asked to discuss the proposal with me in person. He has continued to be very interested in the study and has allowed me to use the company's name. He is hopeful that the findings can be published and will have relevance to other family-owned businesses, in particular those in the architectural/engineering field.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, document review, and observations. Use of multiple methods provides triangulation to ensure credibility of the research data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### *Interviews*

#### *Sampling Approach*

A purposeful sampling approach was used for the interviews. Creswell said that this is “a key decision point in a qualitative study” (1998, p. 118). Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 28) identified the various types of sampling strategies, since the type of strategy or approach that is taken depends on the purpose of the study. Two of these strategies were random purposeful and stratified purposeful. In the former, the researcher selects people randomly because the sample to select from is so large that it would be difficult to do otherwise. In the latter, the researcher selects subgroups of the larger sample in order

to facilitate comparisons. The interview subjects in this case study were carefully selected based on their tenure and role within the organization. I interviewed members of senior management, two of whom had been with the firm for over 30 years. I wanted to interview long-tenured employees to discuss their individual memories of the firm's identity over time. The current CEO had been with the organization since 2001, so he did not have the history with the firm that the others did, but I was interested in how he would describe the stories that he has heard and how he saw the organization's identity today. Dewberry has 34 offices in 17 states, so for the focus groups, I included employees from six of the offices outside of Fairfax, Virginia, which were developed based on organic growth, not acquisitions. These offices were started based on the expansion of business or "new economic activity" (Hitt et al., 2002) in other parts of the greater Washington area, which included other counties in Virginia and Maryland.

Since the research was conducted at the organizational level of analysis, which required input from senior managers, middle managers, and nonmanagers, I ensured that all three of these groups were represented. However, only the senior managers were interviewed individually; middle managers and nonmanagers were interviewed in focus groups. I believed that interviews with senior management would add a level of triangulation to the cohort focus groups of middle managers and nonmanagers.

### *Interviewees*

Ten senior managers were interviewed: two from the 1950s, including Sid Dewberry (the owner and founder) and Richard N. Davis (a former partner); three from the 1970s, including Barry Dewberry (the owner's oldest son, a former partner, and managing principal); one from the 1980s; three from the 1990s; and one from the 2000s,

Ronald L. Ewing (the current CEO). The first interview was conducted on August 6, 2007, and the last on April 1, 2008. Sidney Dewberry is the only one of the founding partners who has been with the organization consistently since it began in 1956.

### *Process*

An interview protocol (see Appendix B) consisting of 15 open-ended questions guided each interview. All of the interviews, with the exception of Richard Davis', were conducted on site at Dewberry's corporate headquarters location in Fairfax, Virginia. The interview with Richard Davis, who is retired, was conducted at his home based on his request. All interviews lasted 1 to 1\_ hours. Participants voluntarily agreed to participate and to have the interview recorded and transcribed.

### *Pilot Interview*

I conducted one pilot interview to determine if the questions were easily understandable and sufficiently answered the research question. This interview was with the owner. I had to change the questions slightly because he was the founder, so instead of asking what he knew of the founding years, for example, I asked him to think back to the early years and talk about what it was like. I had planned 1\_ hours for the interview, but it took just over an hour. I did not change any questions after the pilot interview. The transcript from this pilot interview was reviewed by me and then by my dissertation chairperson. We determined that the questions in the interview protocol provided sufficient information to answer the research questions. I then proceeded with scheduling and conducting the remainder of the interviews.

## *Focus Groups*

The focus group has been defined as a “carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 5). Focus groups share features with other forms of group discussion. The features that set focus groups apart are

- A clear plan for a controlled process and a trusting environment where people feel comfortable participating
- Use of a structured process for collecting and interpreting data
- Selection of participants based on characteristics that they share, as opposed to their differences

Focus groups are good for a guided group discussion; that is, for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the participants’ experiences (Morgan, 1998). One focus group is not sufficient to gather data about a group. Several focus groups need to be used in order for the information to be considered useful (Caffarella, 2002).

### *Sampling Approach*

I used a cohort approach to data collection (Riggs & Turner, 2000; Lawrence, 2002; Schuman & Rodgers, 2004; Schuman & Corning, 2006; Cavanaugh & Casey, 2005) for the focus groups based on the decade participants started their employment with the organization. Employees who joined the organization in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and since 2000 were asked to participate. The only employees who were with the company since before 1960 were the owner and several other family members. Based on the use of cohorts, the sample could be considered homogenous. Homogenous sampling helps to focus the interviews on specific results (Patton, 2002). However, I also

attempted to involve diverse participants by including employees with various tenure, job function, department, level of position, and gender to capture their views on the collective memory of the organization.

I originally planned to conduct 10 focus group meetings—one with middle managers from each decade cohort, and one with nonmanagers from each decade cohort—to have similar groups together and create an atmosphere of trust. In the end, eight focus groups were held; because of the small number of potential participants in the 1960s and 1970s, those decades were combined for the focus groups with managers and nonmanagers.

I decided to limit the interviews and focus groups to people who were part of the headquarters location and surrounding local offices. This part of the organization is called Dewberry and Davis, LLC, and is considered to be the flagship of the organization and the most established location in terms of the organization's history. Limiting the focus groups to this location held several advantages: it allowed me to better study temporal continuity in identity; it provided more access to employees who had been part of the organization for a longer period of time; and it avoided ambiguity when discussing the founding years, in that all participants were referring to the same company, i.e., Dewberry, rather than a company that had been acquired by Dewberry.

According to Casey and Olsen (2005), "This essential meaning of key organizational figures and events is represented in various collective memories throughout generations and through multiple subcultures in organizations with the critical meaning drawn from the core heritage of the organization" (pp. 13-14). In this case, the

central unit was Dewberry and Davis, LLC, the founding unit that has existed over time and space and could be examined over the 52-year time period since it was founded.

### *Selection Process*

After obtaining a list of employees from the human resources database for the various cohort time periods, I selected a cross-section of employees at various levels and positions throughout the organization, primarily in the Fairfax, Virginia, area where the corporate headquarters is located. I included people from each of the different business units across the organization; included support staff as well as operations staff; and included people from the various offices in the metropolitan area as mentioned earlier.

Based on recommendations for focus groups (Grudens-Schuck, Allen, & Larson, 2004), I invited more than the recommended maximum of 12 participants, knowing that many people would be unable to attend (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Some initially agreed but later had to cancel. I rescheduled one or two of the focus groups early in the process after not getting enough participants and then decided to send an invitation to a broader number of people while still trying to ensure a representative sample. At times, the people who attended were not as representative as the sample of people who had been invited, and in three instances I had fewer than the recommended six people. I did not know until the day of the focus group that this would be the case and decided to proceed in the hopes that people would arrive late.

### *Participants*

Table 3-1 provides information on the focus groups.

**Table 3-1  
The Eight Focus Groups**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Date held</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. 1960s, 1970s/ managers	9/19/07	6	Pilot study. Participation: 4, in person; 2, teleconference. Business units: 5, land development; 1, federal programs. (The Virginia and Maryland offices of land development were represented.)
2. 1960s, 1970s/ nonmanagers	3/19/08	2	Business units: 1, federal programs; 1, transportation. (This session had been scheduled in February and rescheduled due to not having 6 participants. On this date others had said they would attend but did not show up.)
3. 1980s/ managers	2/08/08	8	Participation: 5, in person; 3, teleconference. Four were from offices outside of Fairfax. Business units: 4 land development, 2 federal programs, 1 infrastructure, planning, and design, and 1 support staff, i.e. information technology. (The Virginia and Maryland offices of land development were represented.)
4. 1980s/ nonmanagers	3/5/08	8	Participation: 8 in person. Business units: 2, federal programs; 1, infrastructure, planning, and design; 5, support staff (i.e., accounting).
5. 1990s/ managers	3/20/08	4	Participation: 4, in person. Business units: 2, federal programs; 1, infrastructure, planning and design; 1 support staff (i.e., accounting).
6. 1990s/ nonmanagers	4/2/08	6	Participation: 5, in person; 1, teleconference. Business units: 3, federal programs; 3 support staff (i.e., 1, information technology; 1, accounting; 1, logistics).
7. 2000s/ managers	4/22/08	10	Participation: 9, in person; 1, teleconference. Business units: 5, federal programs; 1, land development; 1, infrastructure, planning, and design; 3, support staff (2, information technology; 1, marketing).
8. 2000s/ nonmanagers	4/29/08	5	Participation: 4, in person; 1, teleconference. Business units: 2, federal programs; 3, support staff (i.e., 1, human resources; 1, information technology; 1, accounting).

*Process*

Once employees confirmed their willingness to participate, I sent them an electronic copy of the consent form and a copy of the interview questions. I explained the need for the consent form and asked them to bring a signed copy to the focus group session. I asked them to call or e-mail me if they had questions, and I assured them that I would spend time answering their questions about the study prior to beginning the focus

group interviews. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary, and employees were assured that their anonymity would be protected.

Some participants who did not work in Fairfax asked if they could participate by teleconference. Since Dewberry staff are comfortable with this method of communication, I agreed, and six of the eight focus groups had some participants who called in. To identify who said what, I asked all participants to say their name before making a comment. Most did, and when they did not, I was able to recognize their voices during the session as well as in the transcription process.

The focus groups were held at lunch time in a conference room at the corporate headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia. I informed participants that the sessions would be audiotaped and would last up to 1\_ hours. I also distributed a form to collect demographic information about the participants, including their position and how many years they had been with the organization. To achieve a balance of natural conversation and focused discussion, I used an interview guide, as recommended by Morgan and Kreuger (1998) (see Appendix C).

Throughout the focus groups and the individual interviews, I took notes. In particular, I noted tone of voice, expressions, and emotions and kept track of particularly strong segments of the discussions or information that I wanted to pay particular attention to when reviewing the tapes.

### *Pilot Focus Group*

The pilot focus group was conducted with managers from the 1960s and 1970s using the protocol for the individual interviews (see Appendix B). My experience with this group—particularly in how they went on at length in response to the first question

and my worry that all the questions would not be covered in the specified time frame—led me to combine some questions. I did not change the questions on the interview protocol; I adapted them while conducting the interview. In subsequent interviews when asking question 1, I asked them what seemed important at the time that they started to work at the company. I combined questions 9 and 10 by asking them to talk about what values were important and how the values were communicated. I asked about the values in question 9 when asking about other features and characteristics in question 5. Therefore, I asked what were the most significant features (i.e., philosophy, purpose, attributes, characteristics, and values) of Dewberry. Also, question 6 asked how they learned about the features and question 10 asked how the values were communicated, so the responses to both questions were somewhat the same. In the remaining interviews, I asked if they had anything to add about how the values were communicated, but typically this was already answered in response to question 6. The revisions did not change the nature of the questions but enabled me to save some time during the remaining focus group sessions.

### *Documentation*

Secondary sources of documentation were reviewed, including information about the organization from the website, the strategic plan, policies and procedures, and other sources. The documents reviewed included brochures from the founding period, internal newsletters, magazine articles about the firm, documents about the 25-year anniversary celebration, and the book and video produced for the 50-year anniversary commemoration. The latter two sources provided insight into the types of things that were commemorated. For example, I found that the same types of events, projects, and

people were celebrated at the 50-year anniversary as at the 25-year anniversary. This type of information helps answer the question of how the organization's identity (what it holds central, distinct, and enduring; Albert & Whetten, 1985) compares now to what it was in the past.

I used the document review as a secondary means of gathering data to reinforce the data gathered from the primary source of information, which was that of the interviews and focus groups. The same CDE features were mentioned in these documents as the ones that surfaced in the recollections of cohort members across the decades.

Conducting the document review was helpful to me as a researcher. The documents that were maintained revealed what the company sees as important to its past and its history. Some of these documents also showed which events were highly regarded, celebrated, and commemorated. Other documents, such as the policies and procedures, provided me with information to validate the recollections from the interviewees and focus group members as part of the triangulation for the study.

Document summary forms (see Appendix D) were used to comment on each document.

### *Observations*

I also made observations of the workplace, including the physical setting and the behavior of employees and managers in meetings and during the interviews and focus group sessions. Throughout the buildings were numerous photographs of highways, bridges, and buildings that showcased the various projects designed by the firm over the years, including some award-winning projects of particular prestige. Meetings that were observed included the new employee orientation, training sessions such as project

management training, and meetings and training sessions in which the CEO and/or founder participated. Also included in the observation was the corporate museum, located in the lobby level of the main headquarters facility in Fairfax, Virginia. The corporate museum exhibits artifacts such as maps and survey tools from the earliest days of the organization.

Observations were also made as a secondary source of data. The observations were useful in that the researcher heard first hand how the company's practices and other CDE features were communicated to employees through the different communication vehicles used by the firm. Observing the photographs and the corporate museum in the lobby of the headquarters building reinforced CDE features and significant events mentioned in the document review section as well as in the data collection from the focus groups.

Observation of the corporate museum emphasized the importance of surveying and its place in the founding of the firm. It showed the interest and passion of the founder for this land development and surveying practice. The photographs of projects throughout the headquarters lobby and hallways emphasized many key projects that distinguished the firm in the major areas of capabilities and services that it provides and showed the impact of the firm's work on the surrounding community. It brought to life many of the comments and conversations that took place while I was conducting the interviews and focus groups. Using this method of observation also helped to provide triangulation of data for the study.

Observation summary forms (see Appendix E) were used to comment on each observation.

## **Data Analysis**

### *Transcription of Recordings of Interviews and Focus Groups*

After I conducted an interview, I transcribed the tape before conducting the next interview. I transcribed the initial interviews myself, listening to each interview multiple times to ensure accuracy. Because of the extensive amount of time required, I used a transcription service for 12 of the 18 tapes. This service picked up most of the words but sometimes missed or inaccurately represented names of Dewberry employees, clients, and industry-specific terms. I was able to make those corrections in most instances as I listened to the tapes to review the transcripts and ensure their accuracy. I was also able to use notes and voice recognition to confirm the identity of each speaker in the focus group sessions.

I conducted a member check by allowing the person interviewed or a volunteer from the focus group to review the transcript and ensure I had captured the responses correctly. All 10 interviewees responded that they were fine with the way the transcript read, with the exception of Mr. Dewberry. Mr. Dewberry made a few changes to the spelling of a few people's names and companies. Similar changes were made in the transcripts from the eight focus groups after the member check. All in all, no significant changes were made to the transcripts.

### *Coding*

After reading and rereading the transcripts and analyzing them for patterns, I selected 18 preliminary codes that encompassed the major themes that appear in the language of the interviewees and focus group members. I purchased software called MAXQDAplus for the purpose of coding the interviews. I grouped the codes according to

identity claims that employees mentioned were core and enduring and those that employees labeled as differentiators. As I went through the transcripts line by line, however, I also created new codes for additional themes that seemed to emerge. I selected not only words that were the same but words and phrases that I felt had the same meaning. For example, often the words “client focus” were used, but other times people would say “customer satisfaction” or “caring about the client.” I grouped these under the code “client focus.” Reputation was another code that I selected. If people said that everyone was familiar with Dewberry or Dewberry was always referred to as one of the top 50 engineering firms, I would capture those words or phrases under the code for reputation.

It took me about 3 weeks to complete the coding. I went through every cohort focus group interview to select quotes that fit the codes (identity features) that were mentioned most frequently. I then did a comparison of codes for each of the decades to determine if each cohort group came up with the same identity claims for what they saw as being core, distinct, and enduring.

I selected those codes that were mentioned by every cohort and in most of the interviews. I then narrowed the codes down by counting the number of times each was mentioned and choosing the codes mentioned with the most frequency.

### *Qualitative and Comparative Analysis*

Counting is most often used (a) to observe the general drift, themes, or trend of the data; (b) to verify a hypothesis by counting the data; and (c) to keep the researcher analytically honest (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 252-254). I followed the guidance of Miles and Huberman by using the following steps: “(a) establishing the discrete findings,

(b) relating the findings to each other, (c) naming the pattern, and (d) identifying corresponding constructs” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 262). These steps helped to test and confirm the findings to determine how commemoration helped to shape identity and whether or not the features of the organization being studied have remained central, distinct, and enduring over time (Albert & Whetten, 1985). One of the primary means of measuring this is to see if the identity claims are apparent in the organizational policies and practices (Whetten, 2007). To verify that the features were indeed core and central to the organization’s practices, I examined the company’s policies and procedures for evidence that these features were embedded in the expectations for day-to-day practices.

In addition, a constant comparative approach was used when reviewing information from the interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents to determine categories and themes they had in common (Creswell, 1998). I compared all the data from the documents, the observations, interviews, and focus groups to determine how the organization’s identity had changed over the years.

Even though the software was helpful to capture the frequency of CDE features that were mentioned, I combed through each interview and focus group transcript to determine how the words were used and to select quotes that I deemed representative of the use of the CDE features that were most frequently mentioned. This deeper analysis of all of the transcripts involving the senior managers, focus group managers, and focus group nonmanagers also provided additional triangulation for the study. I compared across cohort decades as well. This process is further described in the data analysis section of chapter 4.

I did not count the codes in the documents or write-ups of my observations or enter them into the MAXQDA database. I looked through the documents and wrote down the CDE features that were present. In my observations I wrote down the key themes that were being mentioned by top management. I noted many of the same CDE features.

### Methods for Verification and Trustworthiness

Creswell and Miller (1997, as cited by Creswell, 1998) listed eight procedures for verification and trustworthiness. My use of six of the eight procedures in this study is outlined in Table 3-2.

**Table 3-2**  
**Procedures for Verification and Trustworthiness**

Available procedure	Use in this study
<b>Prolonged engagement and persistent observation:</b> In the field building trust with participants	Was in the field building trust on a day-to-day basis
<b>Triangulation:</b> Multiple and different sources of information and data	Used both interviews and focus groups, encompassing employees of different levels, as well as observation and document review
<b>Peer review:</b> An external check of the research process	Shared pilot interview transcripts with committee chairperson
<b>Clarifying researcher bias:</b> Clarifying his or her position up front	Was interviewed by an outside person before starting the pilot interviews; that interview was transcribed
<b>Member checks:</b> Soliciting interviewees' view of the findings	Interviewees reviewed the transcript, and a member of each focus group reviewed each focus group transcript
<b>Rich, thick description:</b> Detailed description that aids transferability	Used rich quotes from each type of data source and detailed description of the observations and document reviews

Since I am an employee of the organization being studied, I paid particular attention to interviewer bias. As noted in Table 3-2, I had a colleague interview me using the interview questions from the study so that my answers to the questions at that point would be documented and could be compared with those of the study subjects for possible interviewer bias.

After reviewing all of the other transcripts and looking back to the answers that I gave when I was interviewed, there is a marked similarity in my responses. The CDE features that I mentioned that seemed to be most distinct for Dewberry in comparison to other firms were the company's reputation and its emphasis on client focus, quality, and integrity. I had heard that quality was a big differentiator compared to other firms in terms of being able to deliver a quality service within the time that it was expected to be delivered. The other CDE feature that I emphasized repeatedly was the emphasis on opportunities for employees, mostly in the context of professional development opportunities. I also noted that opportunities happened within the context of a company with diverse capabilities and the involvement of senior managers. I referenced training programs that I observed as part of my job and how much I had heard about the CDE features of client focus, quality, integrity, and opportunities for employees' professional growth. Senior managers who facilitated these training programs emphasized that the company really cares about people's development and wants them to have challenging work, because this is what will make them want to stay at Dewberry. In my role as director of training and development, my focus is the professional development of the employees. However, this CDE feature of caring about employees also showed up as a differentiator in the interviews and focus groups that I conducted as well.

Even though I completed research in my own organization, I had only been working there for a year when the study was initiated. I felt that the use of triangulation in the study would help to ensure trustworthiness and reliability. As previously stated, these measures of triangulation included data collection through an organizational level of

analysis during the interview process as well as participant observations and an analysis of company documents.

Creswell (1998) recommended that researchers use any two of the procedures in their study, with the most convenient and most frequently used being triangulation, thick description, and member checks. Those three—plus three others, prolonged engagement, peer review, and clarification of researcher bias—were used in this study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 288-297) compiled a list of what they refer to as “specific ethical issues.” Table 3-3 lists each issue and indicates how it was addressed in this study.

**Table 3-3**  
**How Specific Ethical Issues Were Addressed in the Study**

<b>Issue and definition</b>	<b>Way it was addressed in this study</b>
<b>Worthiness of the project:</b> Is the study worth doing? Will it contribute in some way other than to benefit my personal pursuits?	The study was deemed to be worthy by my manager, the owner of the company, the owner’s oldest son, and the current CEO of the company, as well as by my dissertation committee and the institutional review board of the George Washington University. The contributions to be made by the study are mentioned in chapter 2 and 5.
<b>Competence boundaries:</b> Do I have the expertise to carry out a good study?	As a doctoral student with the guidance of a dissertation chairperson and committee, I am deemed competent to sufficiently carry out this study.
<b>Informed consent:</b> Do people have full knowledge of the study and how it will be used? Is their participation voluntary or involuntary?	I used the consent form issued by the institutional review board of The George Washington University. This consent form mentioned that people were free to drop out of the study at any time. Signing this form indicated that their participation was voluntary and that even after the interview or focus group, they could withdraw their permission for me to use their data. I spent time with each participant explaining this before each interview or focus group. I made sure that they signed the form before the sessions began.
<b>Benefits, costs, and reciprocity:</b> What will each person gain from participating in the study?	Everyone who was interviewed had the opportunity to share things about their organization that were important to them in an environment of trust and respect. Since participation was voluntary, they decided that it was something worthwhile in which to participate. No one gained anything financially.

<b>Issue and definition</b>	<b>Way it was addressed in this study</b>
	Those who participated in the focus groups had to give up their lunch hour plus another half hour. They knew this up front and willingly participated. They were afforded the opportunity to review the transcript and the final dissertation.
<b>Harm and risk:</b> Could there be possible harm to anyone who participated in the form of threats about their job, possibly looking bad to others, etc.?	Participants were assured that the owners and top management were aware of and in favor of the study and also that what they said would be kept anonymous. They were offered the opportunity to review the transcript to ensure that they were comfortable with how their comments were documented. They also knew that they could withdraw from the study at any time.
<b>Honesty and trust:</b> What is my relationship with the participants? Do we trust each other?	In my role in the organization, I knew most but not all participants. When I indicated that I had the permission of Sid Dewberry, Barry Dewberry, and Ron Ewing, people seemed to feel good about participating in the study. The explanation of how the information would be portrayed along with the official forms from The George Washington University also lent credibility to the study.
<b>Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity:</b> How will the information be guarded? How will their identity be kept anonymous?	Mr. Dewberry gave me permission to use the company name and therefore his name in the study, as did Barry Dewberry and Ron Ewing, the CEO. I think that others would have given permission to use their names as well, but I told them up front that their identity would be protected. I did not identify other people by name but only by cohort and manager/nonmanager role. I kept the files on my home computer, which was not accessible to anyone but me.
<b>Intervention and advocacy:</b> Would I intervene if I saw harmful behavior?	I would; however, I did not witness any harmful behavior or threats to anyone who participated in this study.
<b>Research integrity and quality:</b> Is my study being conducted in a thoughtful and careful manner to the best of my ability?	I have done my best to portray my data accurately and responsibly. I have used the MAXQDAplus software to help to ensure the integrity of my data. I am willing to share my data with my dissertation committee members.
<b>Ownership of data and conclusions:</b> Who owns my data? Is it me, is it my organization, is it the George Washington University?	I feel I am responsible for the dissemination of the data. However, it will be published by the George Washington University as a doctoral dissertation. My company also has an interest in the data and may want me to use it for additional publications that are outside of the purview of the university. I have told the participants of the study that I will not use the data for other publications without gaining their consent.
<b>Use and misuse of results:</b> Am I obligated to use my findings appropriately?	I have been clear with all study participants as to how my findings will be used.

<b>Issue and definition</b>	<b>Way it was addressed in this study</b>
<b>Conflicts, dilemmas, and trade-offs:</b> E.g., if someone gave permission for use of his/her name and revealed something embarrassing or potentially harmful, should I use that information and name? If I don't, does that taint the data's authenticity?	I feel comfortable that the data I have gathered for this study will not be harmful to any of the participants, particularly since I have allowed them to do a member check of the data.
<b>Advice:</b> Would it be helpful to discuss ethical issues with others who have similar experience in conducting qualitative studies?	I have colleagues who have conducted similar studies and have used exemplars, i.e., similar studies conducted by others, as well as the advice of my committee members.

In summary, chapter 3 has presented information about qualitative research, the use of case studies, and the type of case study that I conducted. I outlined the research design, which included interviews, focus groups, observation, and document review. I provided information about the organization that served as the research site and the data analysis methods that were utilized. I described the potential for interviewer bias and the ethical considerations monitored throughout the process. I have complied with the established guidelines of The George Washington University and the institutional review board for conducting ethical research studies. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **FINDINGS**

Quality is still very much in evidence in the strong client focus and service orientation of Dewberry. —John Fowler II, PE, past CEO and current member of the board (Dewberry & Brown, 2006, p. 96)

The overarching research question for this study was: How does the interpretation of an organization's identity change over time as depicted in the official histories and commemorations in a 50-year-old family-owned business? The three subquestions formulated to address this overarching question were the following:

1. How are the central, distinct, and enduring (CDE) features recalled and interpreted in recollections of significant events as described by cohorts of employees in the organization?
2. How are the CDE features of the organization represented in the official histories of the organization?
3. How are the CDE features of the organization represented in the commemoration of significant events as part of the 25th and 50th anniversary celebrations?

For subquestion 1, interviews were conducted with 10 members of the executive staff, and a total of eight focus groups were conducted. The recollections of executive managers from the individual interviews as well as the recollections of managers and nonmanagers in focus groups from the five decades since the organization's founding were compared both within and across cohorts. This comparison serves to determine which CDE features were most frequently mentioned in the significant events in the company's history. These significant events were the ones that were felt to have the biggest impact on the organization over time as recalled by cohort groups. For

subquestion 2, an analysis of official histories and documents was used to determine how the CDE features of the organization have been represented over time throughout the organization's history. For subquestion 3, the CDE features of the organization that emerged in the commemoration of significant events during anniversary celebrations were also analyzed. In addition, the researcher also observed three organizational events and analyzed exhibits in the company museum that is located in the lobby of the firm's headquarters building. CDE features from these observations were also identified and analyzed in comparison to the three previously mentioned data points.

The overarching research question was answered by examining the data gathered to address each of the three subquestions. CDE features were identified through each data source, i.e., the cohort groups, the documents and observations, and the commemorative events. Those features of the organization that were considered to be CDE after conducting the comparative analysis mentioned above were analyzed to arrive at the interpretation of the identity over time. By examining the significant events depicted over the 50-year time span and the CDE features that surfaced during events considered to be most significant (turning points in the company's history), the interpretation of the organization's identity over time emerged.

The researcher was given permission to use the Dewberry company name in the study; however, those interviewed were told their anonymity would be protected. Several of the senior managers gave permission to use their name, i.e., Sid Dewberry, founder and chairman of the board; his son Barry Dewberry, chairman of the executive committee; and Ron Ewing, the CEO. All others were identified by group: senior manager (SM), manager (M), or nonmanager (NM). In response to subquestion 1, quotes

from the eight focus groups from the four time periods were used (summary shown in Table 4-5 later in this chapter). Focus groups of staff and middle managers were the primary source of the research data. Additional sources were senior managers' individual interviews, documents, and researcher observations.

This chapter includes extensive verbatim quotes from the interview with Sid Dewberry and from the focus group participants and senior managers who were interviewed. It also includes a list of official company documents that were reviewed with a description of each of the documents and the CDE features that emerged in each. Researcher observations of the four events are included. An analysis of the commemorative events of the 25th and 50th anniversaries of the firm is presented. After the findings for each of the subquestions are summarized, the chapter ends with the answer to the overarching research question.

### **Organizational Identity: CDE Features Identified in Interviews and Focus Groups**

This section addresses the first subquestion: How are these CDE features recalled and interpreted *in recollections of significant events* as described by cohorts of employees in the organization? It describes the significant events and CDE features identified by the founder, Sid Dewberry, and then reviews the significant events and CDE features identified by the cohorts—using both individual interview data and focus group data.

#### *Significant Events and Initial CDE Features Identified by the Founder*

Sidney O. Dewberry, chairman and founder, was the first person to be interviewed. The following CDE features emerged in this interview: *care of the employees, client focus, diverse capabilities, family-owned business, growth-oriented,*

*integrity, land development, and quality.* (The CDE features will be italicized throughout the rest of the document to emphasize their consistency to the reader.) Of these, the ones that were present since the founding were *care of employees, client focus, growth-oriented, integrity, land development, and quality.* The other CDE features surfaced later and have remained since the point which they emerged. *Diverse capabilities* became a prominent feature in 1974 when Dewberry won the contract from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the Flood Insurance Project and in 1989 when it acquired a major transportation firm in the Northeast. The *family-owned business* feature was evident in 1986 after Dick Davis retired and the firm was owned solely by the Dewberry family.

Some of these CDE features surfaced through the founder's sharing of significant events, while others were identified in answer to the interview questions directly asking about features that were considered to be CDE to the firm. Significant events are listed first with the corresponding CDE feature that is represented. Each of these CDE features is also described and evidence from the interview discussed in the following section.

### *Significant Events*

Mr. Dewberry told the story of how he founded the organization with three former colleagues, Marcus F. H. Greenhorne, A. James O'Mara, and James D. Nealon. This story was also recounted in the 50th anniversary commemorative book. He talked about the struggles and hard work of those years. When his partners wanted to give up, he convinced them to commit to staying in business for at least a year.

We struggled real hard, and after about 8 months we had pretty well gone through all of the money that had been advanced for the payroll purposes, and Greenhorne and O'Mara wanted to close the thing down and give it up. Well, I didn't have a

job except this job, and I said, “Well, let’s give it a year. Let’s try it for a year.” And so we did. And after 1 year we got two jobs—two nice jobs on the same day—1 year to the day actually.

Even in the early years, the firm became quite successful in its niche:

And our firm Dewberry and Davis—or Dewberry, Nealon, and Davis at that time—were the leaders, and so we had the lion share of the work, and that was probably 75% of the business in land development in Northern Virginia.

This quote shows the CDE feature of Dewberry as a primary *land development* firm in Northern Virginia.

In the course of the interview, Sid Dewberry highlighted other significant events as well:

- Winning the huge HUD project after responding to an ad placed in the *Commerce Business Daily* in 1974. Within 2 to 3 years, this work had become one third of the company’s business and the company grew tremendously. Winning this project put Dewberry into an entirely different type of business providing services to the federal government and allowed the firm to diversify and grow (*growth and diverse capabilities*).
- Hiring John Fowler in 1983, which strengthened the firm’s involvement in the transportation business (*growth and diverse capabilities*).
- Acquisition of a major transportation firm in the Northeast in 1989 (*growth and diverse capabilities*).
- Establishing The Dewberry Institute, the in-house corporate university, where a professional educator was brought on board to oversee it (*care of employees*).

Next Mr. Dewberry discussed what he saw as the features that made Dewberry distinct from other architectural/engineering (A/E) firms in the early years as well as what made Dewberry distinct from other A/E firms today.

### *Quality*

When talking about what made his company distinct from other A/E firms in the early years, Mr. Dewberry felt that what set his firm apart from the other approximately 51 competitors at the time was the quality and professionalism of the land development plans. Quality was one of the firm's CDE features and something that he still felt was core to the organization and set the firm apart today. He talked about creating standards that were adopted by Fairfax County back in the 1950s and 1960s and later by other firms. He felt that Dewberry's land development plans were a higher quality than those of other firms, and because they were so well done and so professional they were accepted by the county much more quickly. Clients were of course very pleased about this and would come back to Dewberry for repeat business due to this differentiator of their quality work.

### *The Dewberry Way*

When asked about other features of the organization that were core since the beginning and that had differentiated the organization from others, he noted the principles and practices stated in "The Dewberry Way": maximum value for minimum dollars, *care of the clients*, *care of the employees*, and teamwork. Mr. Dewberry mentioned that these core values were communicated in *The Dewberry Way* book and on the website and that he tried to communicate them in all of his talks with employees. He hoped that key

people, such as senior managers and those who interviewed potential new employees, reiterated these important values. He said these had not changed since the company's inception, even though they were formally written down only about 10 years ago and posted within the organization for everyone to see.

He noted that several of these values were core and had been part of the organization since its beginning. He also noted that they were evident in the practices and policies as well as the decisions that were made about the direction of the company. Examples of core features as practices and policies are also described in the quotes from the cohort groups in the following section of this chapter.

#### *Care of Employees*

Mr. Dewberry talked about what he liked to stress to new employees and especially to young people. He explained to them that if they did not know which engineering discipline they wanted to focus on, they could try out several areas. He emphasized the significant opportunities offered to Dewberry employees by the organization. He mentioned that he was proud of the training and education that the firm offered and the direction and emphasis of the corporate university, which had its name changed in recent years from The Dewberry Institute to The Dewberry Learning Center.

#### *Client Focus*

Mr. Dewberry addressed client focus in this part of the interview:

I think we're unique in that we really care. We really care about our clients' problems . . . . Not to say that other firms don't also care, but I think the level of intensity is more here than there.

In essence, Sid Dewberry saw the practice of *caring for clients* as something that differentiated his firm from others and that was core to the organization since its beginning. He shared a story of going to measure a plot of land after dark and using the headlights of his automobile to help do the measuring. His partner wanted to wait until the next day, but Sid was worried about the job and didn't feel he would be able to sleep until he knew how he would solve the problem. So they worked all night and the next morning they had it solved. He said he also made it a point to learn the wives' names and children' names of all of his clients so that he could build relationships with them over time.

When asked how he was able to maintain these features in the organization today, he responded,

Well, it's tough. It really is tough. It takes constant vigilance and as long as I'm chairman of this company, I'm going to continue to harp on people to remember that we want to take care of the client.

### *Integrity*

Mr. Dewberry also highlighted the integrity of the organization as one of its core features. He felt this feature had endured and differentiated the firm from other companies in its sector. He discussed an example of how to retain *integrity* when dealing with disagreements with a client:

You don't argue with the client. He's paying you, and if he's doing something that's wrong, you need to point it out to him and try to persuade him otherwise. If you can't persuade him otherwise, then do it his way unless it violates some ethical responsibility or some moral responsibility. If he wants to put in a 15-inch storm drain pipe when your calculations show that a 36 inch is required and he wants to put in a 15 inch to save money, well, you quit, you resign from the project. You don't let him push you around like that.

This is one example he gave about integrity in the interview. He stressed to project managers that as consultants, they needed to ensure that the client knew what was in his or her best interest. However, if the client wanted you to do something illegal or something that would jeopardize the quality or safety of the job, then you should not accept the job.

### *Growth-Oriented*

Mr. Dewberry also referenced his organization's growth orientation as a significant factor that influenced day-to-day decisions and differentiated them from other organizations. In speaking of how these features impacted day-to-day decisions, Mr. Dewberry said he did not want to grow too quickly because he wanted to ensure that acquisitions were made only when there was a clear match with the capabilities of the firm and the way Dewberry believed in doing business. He saw *growth* as an important strategy:

We are *growth oriented*—not too fast, but growth oriented. I think, again, if you don't grow, you're going to shrink. So I think it's very important to have a goal to [grow], and that's part of our culture is to grow.

Two examples of the *growth orientation* were the acquisition of a major transportation firm in the Northeast in 1989 to acquire additional work and capabilities and the acquisition of an architectural firm in the Midwest in 2004 to become stronger in the architecture arena. The fact that such a major architectural firm was acquired was significant. It not only increased the firm's presence in the architectural industry but also expanded the geographic footprint of the firm into the Midwest.

## *More Recent CDE Features: Family-Owned Business and Diverse Capabilities*

### Family-Owned Business

Mr. Dewberry felt that another feature that made the firm unique was the fact that it is *family owned*.

I think we're unique in that we are a family-owned business. I don't know of any other business in the A/E business that's the size that we are that is family-owned. . . . There's probably some out there that's owned by one person that are similar to us, but I don't know of any and I think that's unique.

It took us 50 years to build up the culture that we have, and it would be very disconcerting to this company or any other company if all of a sudden we sold, the family sold the business to somebody else. They [the employees] wouldn't know whether to stay and check it out or what. So we have, I think we have solved the ownership transition by making the business a *family-owned business* because you can pass ownership in the same family on down and it's all sorts of tax advantages in doing that without having to come up with a large sum of money. So we certainly are unique in that respect.

### Diverse Capabilities

Mr. Dewberry commented that the firm started as a land development firm, but its core work changed over the years.

We've been trying to do architectural work for years and we succeeded a little bit, but the world thinks of us as engineers, so we finally acquired PSA and now I think the word is getting through that we are both architects and engineers, but it's going to be a while and it changes with geography too. If you're in this area, right around in Washington, most people still think of us as engineers.

Mr. Dewberry explained that the firm used to be known more as a *land development* and engineering firm and can now be referred to as an A/E firm since it has a significant presence in architecture. The firm also does a significant amount of transportation work and work with federal government clients. These changes occurred in the 1970s and 1980s and have endured since that time.

These changes in the focus of the services are examples of the CDE feature of *diverse capabilities* that is noted throughout the interview. Acquiring stronger capabilities in architecture and transportation were the result of the acquisition of two major firms: Goodkind & O’Dea in 1989, a company with a strong presence in the transportation arena, and PSA in 2004, a fairly large architecture firm. Winning the HUD contract in 1974 gave the firm its entrance into the federal government arena. Expanding into these other service lines was evidence of the firm’s practice of being *growth-oriented* and making sure that it had *diverse capabilities* to provide a strong portfolio of services for its clients.

### *Summary*

In summary, the primary CDE features that surfaced in the interview with Mr. Dewberry were *care of the employee, client focus, diverse capabilities, family-owned business, integrity (intellectual honesty), growth*, being known as a *land development firm*, and *quality*. These above-mentioned features were often linked with each other, especially when Mr. Dewberry referred to them as *The Dewberry Way*. The ones that were present since the founding were *care of the employees, client focus, growth integrity, land development, and quality*. The following became CDE features as the company grew and expanded and as the ownership changed and evolved: *diverse capabilities* and *family ownership*.

### *CDE Features Identified by Those in the 1950s to 1970s Cohort*

To cover this early period, four individual interviews were conducted as well as two focus groups: one with managers who joined the firm in the 1960s and 1970s and one

with nonmanagers who joined in that time period. To be able to compare employee interpretations of this period, I reviewed the history that appeared in *The Dewberry Way* book. *The Dewberry Way* book titled these decades as follows:

- 1950s: Friday the 13th—A Lucky Day
- 1960s—Building the Suburban Dream
- 1970s—Mapping the Future

*The Dewberry Way* explained the founding. On April 13, 1956, the firm Greenhorne, O’Mara, Dewberry, & Nealon celebrated its first day in business as an engineering and land development firm in Arlington, Virginia. Sid Dewberry, an engineer and surveyor, and Jim Nealon, a surveyor, had worked together for a few months while employed by another land development firm in Northern Virginia. To help him finance the business, Sid Dewberry had also approached one of his former employers, Greenhorne & O’Mara in Maryland, and asked that they purchase a share of the business. The four men spent a year trying to get the business off the ground and won two big jobs the day of their 1-year anniversary when several of them were about to give up. Two years later, they hired Dick Davis to be the firm’s chief engineer.

In the 1960s, aside from the turbulence in the country over the Viet Nam War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and other things, American families were pursuing the American dream of buying a home. Many new suburban developments were springing up, and Greenhorne, O’Mara, Dewberry & Nealon played a large part in this development in Maryland and Northern Virginia. Some of the big projects were Montgomery Village in Maryland and Kings Park in Virginia. By 1965 the firm had grown to over 50 employees and relocated to a new building in Fairfax. Several years later, Greenhorne & O’Mara

decided to split off from their other two partners. There was an agreement that Greenhorne & O'Mara would take the business on the Maryland side of the Potomac and Dewberry & Nealon would keep the business on the Virginia side. It was at this time that Dewberry & Nealon invited Dick Davis to become a partner in the business, creating the firm of Dewberry, Nealon & Davis.

Washington, being a boomtown, provided many opportunities to the surrounding area compared with other parts of the country. Winning the HUD contract in 1974 was mentioned as the most significant event of this decade. The goal of the project was to prepare detailed maps of areas that were prone to flooding across the United States. About 18 months after winning that contract, 150 people were brought in and trained and assigned to work on it. In 1973, Jim Nealon retired, and in 1975 Barry Dewberry officially came to work for the firm.

#### *Data from the 1950s to 1970s Cohort*

Through quotes from the interviews, I highlight the CDE features that emerged in the focus group discussions with managers and employees of the firm (see Table 4-1). Some of the CDE characteristics were discussed in the context of significant events. Others were in response to being asked questions about what was important in the early years, what made Dewberry different from other firms then, what made it distinct, and what events were commemorated. The significant events this cohort focused on included:

- The founding of the firm in 1956 (*land development, client focus, quality, integrity, growth*)
- The Montgomery Village Project (*land development, growth*)
- The splitting off of former partners Greenhorne & O'Mara (*growth concerns*)

- The winning of the first HUD contract (*growth, diverse capabilities*)
- The opening of new offices closer to the clients (*growth, client focus*)
- The new building in 1981, which brought everyone together and gave Mr. Dewberry “an opportunity to communicate his vision a lot more effectively” (*growth, care of employees*)
- The Wolftrap Project (*integrity*)
- Hiring John Fowler and getting into the transportation arena (*growth, diverse capabilities*)
- The first major layoffs of the 1990s (*care of employees*)

**Table 4-1**  
**Quotes Describing CDE Features from the 1950s to 1970s Cohort\***

CDE feature	Quotes
Care of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They didn’t just want good people; they took good care of them. . . . They were very open minded and . . . once you committed to the company they kind of committed to you. [M]</li> <li>• It was clearly client focused and they seemed to really value their employees—and still do. [M]</li> <li>• When I came here in ’78, I had very limited English. . . . I had a lot of help from the people in the company. . . . I would say that was one of the things that I really appreciated. [NM]</li> <li>• A lot of people came back after they left. A lot of people do return. [NM]</li> <li>• I remember the times in the 1970s when we were going through some really bad times in the company because of land development. I remember they had bankers come in. Mr. Dewberry was looking to get a loan instead of laying people off. . . . [M]</li> <li>• [regarding layoffs in the 1990s]: People, they knew exactly what happened. They knew the company wouldn’t do something because they didn’t like you or they want to just let go of somebody. . . . The construction was in really bad shape, and they had to do that. [NM]</li> <li>• I tell them at Dewberry the sky’s the limit for them. If they want to go far, they can go far. The resources are there, the opportunities are there, so that’s what I usually tell most people. [M]</li> <li>• It was always sort of appreciated that people who worked hard and worked smart were given opportunities to grow and take on more responsibilities. [M]</li> <li>• I’ve always felt like I’ve had new opportunities and new projects to work on. [NM]</li> </ul>

<b>CDE feature</b>	<b>Quotes</b>
<b>Client focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It didn't seem to matter what the clients, even if they were unreasonable, what their requests were; we seemed to end up working weekends to try to fulfill their requests. [M]</li> <li>• I think the most significant feature of Dewberry was their clear client focus. [M]</li> </ul>
<b>Diverse capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GIS [geographic information systems], it's going in so many directions, and there are a lot of new and interesting things, and a lot of new technology that's being incorporated. [M]</li> <li>• Like somebody else said, we attracted a real high level of intelligence in engineers, surveyors, planners, and they were all involved in everything from builders associations—they were involved in the business of engineering and surveying. And they had a reputation that was very high.</li> </ul>
<b>Family-owned business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I liked the fact that it was a family-owned business and we owned it and we didn't have to please a bunch of stockholders who didn't know what we were doing. [M]</li> <li>• Somebody who owns something looks at it differently than somebody who runs something. [The professionals brought in are] never going to treat it exactly the same, nowhere near the same way as family members treat it. To me it's like blood. When a person leaves, it's a cut, and when you get cut enough it doesn't hurt as much every time, but it's still a cut. . . . They [the professionals] don't feel it in their pocket and they don't feel it emotionally, no they don't, because it's not one of their children. . . . Every wall, every desk, and almost every pencil in this place feels familiar, family, or it did when I was here anyway. . . . I'm just saying that if you're going to hire a professional, you're going to lose some of the family feeling. And it's no way around it and that can be good. . . . I think we've lost something, maybe we've gained some things, but I think we've definitely lost something. —Barry Dewberry</li> <li>• When the business was small, it was a very family atmosphere, and I think we felt responsible for each other. . . . If something was going wrong in one department, they knew about it in another department. . . . With size, some of that's going to change. —Barry Dewberry</li> </ul>
<b>Growth-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Things grew and grew and grew, and it was always growing. The firm acquired other companies to acquire other capabilities. [NM]</li> <li>• I think they were growth-oriented and they were very aggressive. [M]</li> <li>• We had experienced people who knew what they were doing, and Sid had attracted people that were good in the industry and they came to work here and things were expanding rapidly. [M]</li> </ul>

CDE feature	Quotes
<b>Integrity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I heard a lot about integrity because they had made a mistake, and the client—they had to reimburse the client for this mistake. And they were concerned that this had happened but they were also—I will not say proud, but they were satisfied that they had taken care of it. They felt good about it, about doing that. —Dick Davis</li> <li>• You didn't have to play games with them. They were straight with you and you could be straight with them on lots of issues—I mean salary issues, benefits issues, just anything. [M]</li> <li>• Good ethics, trying to give the customer a good value for their money. [NM]</li> </ul>
<b>Origin as a land development firm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So basically it [Dewberry] was the leader in the engineering, as far as the land development. The rest of the companies were doing basically what we were doing, the same way we were doing it. The county, they were making us an example of everything we were doing [because of the quality of the plans]. [NM]</li> </ul>
<b>Quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our work was high quality and very professional looking. —Dick Davis</li> <li>• Quality work and ability to do it on time, which, to our clients, was very important because we had some government clients but mostly private. And they are not like government; they cannot stand the wait. —Dick Davis</li> <li>• Accuracy was critical, and the philosophy was that they wanted good people. [M]</li> <li>• The people there were really dedicated to a quality product and at the same time service to the clients. I think that was very important. [M]</li> <li>• The thing that I felt strongly about right away was you were told to do it right, do it correctly. Don't take short cuts. They wanted to do it correctly, good engineering, good surveying, whatever it was. [M]</li> </ul>

\*Since participants were assured anonymity, codes are used to indicate group: M, manager; NM, nonmanager; SM, senior manager. Managers and nonmanagers were interviewed in separate focus groups, and senior managers were interviewed individually. Some senior managers gave permission to be identified.

### *Summary Analysis for the 1950s to 1970s Cohort*

This group highlighted the same CDE features as reflected in the interview with Mr. Dewberry. They felt that *quality* and *client focus* were still the same and marveled at “the fairy tale success story of Sid Dewberry” and how it was commemorated during the 50-year anniversary celebration as he shared the stories of the founding of the firm.

*Care of employees* was a CDE feature and an organizational practice of the firm. It was evident in the organizational commitment to rehire employees who left the firm

and wanted to come back. This practice was mentioned in every group, and it was emphasized that this practice took the fear out of leaving for some people when they wanted to try a job at another firm. One manager actually mentioned that rehiring people was positive for other reasons. Employees also said that hard work was expected, but those who worked hard were rewarded and given more opportunities. They expressed that there was no limit to their opportunities since Dewberry was a firm with diverse capabilities, whereas at other A/E firms, people did not have as much opportunity for professional growth. They believed that there was a stronger emphasis on the ability to have a meaningful career at Dewberry. Another implication of *care of employees* as an organizational commitment was that Mr. Dewberry thought of taking out a loan instead of laying people off when he was faced with financial setbacks in the 1970s.

*Client focus* was also described as a CDE feature but was just as often referred to as Dewberry's way of doing business. The example provided in the above table showed how employees knew they needed to work all weekend if that was what was necessary to satisfy the needs of a client. This was seen by employees as one of Dewberry's strongest differentiators.

*Diverse capabilities* was mentioned in terms of the employees' skills as well as in the significant events of major acquisitions to acquire capabilities. Dewberry had some employees who were recognized nationally as masters in their disciplines. Acquisitions were made to acquire certain capabilities that the firm wanted to expand their presence in or to expand into geographic regions where it had no presence. *Growth* at times was also referred to in the context of expansion. *Growth* was discussed in regard to opening new offices in Maryland as well as making acquisitions.

One example of *quality* was the story of how Dewberry's land development plans set the standard for quality that was adopted by Fairfax County because they had a more professional appearance than those of other firms and as a result moved through the county's approval process more quickly. Another example of *quality* was being able to get the job done in a *quality* manner and meet the deadlines with speed and accuracy, which was demanded by private clients much more than government clients.

*Integrity* as a practice was evident in several examples. It was evident in the example told by Dick Davis about the organization wanting to set things right if they were at fault on a job. Employees also appreciated the openness and transparency that senior managers displayed when discussing salary, benefits, and other issues that were important to them.

*Family-owned business* was discussed in terms of what made the firm distinct. It was also discussed as an environment that created a more personal connection than a business that is not family-owned. As mentioned previously, these features were discussed in the context of what makes the organization unique from other A/E firms.

#### *CDE Features Identified by Those in the 1980s Cohort*

For the 1980s, one individual interview was conducted as well as two focus groups: one with managers who joined the firm in the 1980s and one with nonmanagers who joined in that time period. Similar to the previous section, I first describe this era as discussed in *The Dewberry Way*. The book called this decade "Peaks and Valleys." A description of what occurred in this decade is highlighted below from this book.

The 1980s at Dewberry brought the firm's 25 year anniversary. There was a move to a new headquarters building in Fairfax, Virginia, which helped to unite many of the

employees that had been housed in several different buildings. This changed the perception of some of the staff who only knew about the aspects of the business in which they were involved until many of them came together in one place.

The 1980s also brought personal computers, cell phones, and the Internet into organizations. There was a huge influx of housing and commercial development work, which benefitted the company, as well as many major transportation projects. A key player named John Fowler was hired to help the company gain more presence in the transportation industry. The firm's largest acquisition was made in 1989, a firm known as Goodkind and O'Dea, now called Dewberry Goodkind. Acquiring this firm in the Northeast increased Dewberry's footprint and helped the firm to meet its strategic objective to enter into new markets and new geographic areas through acquisitions. In the 1980s, the focus of the firm remained on land development, but the federal opportunities began to make a big impact on the company. During the timeframe of the 1980s, the firm focused on growing and diversifying its services.

#### *Data from the 1980s Cohort*

Significant events mentioned by members of this cohort were:

- The founding of the firm in 1956 (*land development, integrity, client focus, quality, growth*)
- The first major layoffs of the early 1990s (*care of employees*)
- The acquisition of a small firm named TOLK (*growth, diverse capabilities*)
- The acquisition of Goodkind & O'Dea in the Northeast that was almost the size of Dewberry's headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia, at that time (*growth, diverse capabilities*)

- The huge impact of the HUD contract on the organization (*growth, diverse capabilities*)
- The impact of the loss of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) contract (*growth, diverse capabilities, good leadership*)

Table 4-2 shows how this cohort reflected on the CDE features of Dewberry when discussing the firm's characteristics and significant events.

**Table 4-2**  
**Quotes Describing CDE Features from the 1980s Cohort\***

CDE feature	Quotes
<b>Care of employees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think a lot of those core values that the company has is what makes people willing to do what you had to do because you felt some loyalty one way, so you feel loyalty back. [M]</li> <li>• They were awfully, awfully nice when my husband was ill and I could come to work part-time and go home when I wanted to. . . . There is a feeling of loyalty. [NM]</li> <li>• [Mr. Dewberry] tried to keep the employees’ loyalty. That goes a long way. Now, he could have easily said: we lost this contract, now do a massive layoff. [NM]</li> <li>• When we talk about the layoffs, it was very personal to him [Mr. Dewberry]. . . . He was like: I do not want to have to lay anybody off. And Glen [the former company controller] talked . . . with Mr. Dewberry [about] a lot of things and that was difficult for him to admit that he was going to have to lay people off. [NM]</li> <li>• [After the loss of the FEMA contract,] I was surprised at the resilience of the management staff and what they did to bring us back around. [NM]</li> <li>• The way Dewberry builds . . . its future leaders and managers is from the bottom up and not so much just going out and hiring all the time. . . . I think that’s been part of the success, is people are sort of brought up right out of college into a job. The ones that stay become the future leaders and carry those values over. [M]</li> <li>• There was a nice element of the flood insurance project, the enormous aspects and its ability to train people. And it was used as a stepping stone to other divisions/departments. [M]</li> </ul>
<b>Client focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We took great pride in keeping our current clients happy and building on them, so that when they got a new project they would remember Dewberry did everything they could do to help them be successful. They call on us to get a lot of repeat work. [SM]</li> </ul>
<b>Diverse capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We can do everything from civil engineering, architectural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, any building you want to build . . . roads, interchanges . . . and I can ask this person this question or that person that question. When that big recession hit around here, that’s when land development really started being less and less of the company. The company, I think, diversified more. [M]</li> <li>• It almost seems like every time we acquire somebody or add somebody to the group that we diversify. We’re doing the Northeast. I can’t really think of what all they did, lot of the cell tower work. We got into that business. [M]</li> <li>• The architects that we picked up, PSA, now we’re doing medical facilities and jail facilities where we weren’t really doing that before, and it seems like we just keep growing—and not just personnel wise, we diversify more, and it makes it more of a stable environment. [M]</li> <li>• As this region evolved and became the metropolitan area that it has become, Dewberry grew with it. [After the layoffs,] I think the philosophy . . . was tighten up and grow by acquisitions. [M]</li> </ul>

CDE feature	Quotes
<b>Family-owned business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was definitely, for a family firm, a can-do, will-do attitude, and I'm not saying that doesn't exist now. I think it clearly does. But you felt that, and I felt that I was connected to specific people; you know, Dewberry and Dick Davis. . . . So that whole attitude which I think is part of the culture, it came from these specific people. Family firm, growth oriented, very much carrying those personal values of certain people on through the organization. [M]</li> <li>• It was a smaller, family-owned company, and it felt like a family-owned company. Now we are a bigger company. [NM]</li> <li>• You can feel secure about the company because it's owned by a person and not a group of people that are just trying to make money. I know Mr. Dewberry's ultimate goal is to make money, but you still feel like you have more security. [NM]</li> <li>• The fact that the founding partners went their separate ways created more of an opportunity for the impact of Sid Dewberry and his values in running the organization. [NM]</li> </ul>
<b>Growth-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From what I gather we started out as a very modest company. . . . They made connections that were very important towards the future growth of Dewberry and those connections, they're still true today. [M]</li> <li>• It certainly seemed at times where they were stretched pretty thin. . . . He sort of worked those personal relationships to get the work in and keep building on it but never really stretching himself too far out, being always pretty financially sound in his decisions in the early years and even now when looking at acquisitions and other things to grow the company further. [M]</li> <li>• When we bought DGI, that was kind of scary because they were almost as big as we were. From an employee standpoint, it made me kind of nervous because it just seemed like things were changing. We used to be this little company and now we are going to buy this company that's almost the same size as us. . . . Now when I hear we are going to buy a company, I feel like, I guess there's more people to make those decisions now, and it's not as scary as it was back then. [NM]</li> </ul>
<b>Integrity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I've never been asked once ever or felt like I was put in a position to do something I wasn't comfortable with. And that goes back to that quality and that does start at the top. [M]</li> <li>• I think Mr. Dewberry had come out of an era [where] . . . if they would shake hands, their word was their bond, and that's kind of how business was done. [NM]</li> </ul>
<b>Origin as a land development firm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was a very much land development, land design focus, but the entry point it seemed like in the company was the flood insurance project. And quite frankly, it was sort of I think used like a minor leagues, if you will. I think it was used that way by some of the staff. You come in, you do this for a while, and then you figure out where you want to fit in in the company. [SM]</li> <li>• We were predominantly a land development company. . . . Land development was still very, very big. As part of it, I took great pride in being the Fairfax, Virginia, land development person. [SM]</li> </ul>
<b>Quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We needed to basically do good work for the clients. We needed to do it quickly but efficiently, and we really didn't have time to go back and</li> </ul>

CDE feature	Quotes
	<p>redo. We wanted to put our best foot forward, so we were constantly working, trying to make things better and get more efficient at what we did. [M]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think the other thing that made it different was the focus on quality. . . . We want to be profitable always but, at least from my perspective, client focus and quality were always more important. [M]</li> <li>• It's not that the Dewberry quality has declined, I don't think. It's just that when Mr. Davis was here, . . . if you were an engineer or an architect . . . and you made a mistake, you had to physically take your plans and put them down on Mr. Davis's desk and you had to show him what you did and why you did it, and you were accountable. [NM]</li> </ul>

\*Since participants were assured anonymity, codes are used to indicate group: M, manager; NM, nonmanager; SM, senior manager. Managers and nonmanagers were interviewed in separate focus groups, and the senior manager was interviewed individually.

### *Summary Analysis for the 1980s Cohort*

The same CDE features were mentioned by the 1980s cohort as by Mr. Dewberry and the 1950s to 1970s cohort. The interpretation of the CDE features was the same; however, there were a few differences in the emphasis of what was discussed. One of the key differences with this group was that the emphasis on *growth* was stronger. This can be attributed to the fact that the first two acquisitions were made in the 1980s. One of the acquisitions was significant in that it was almost the same size as the Dewberry company headquarters. Employees were worried about the impact of such a large acquisition on the firm, how it might change the CDE features and the organization as they knew it and what the impact of that might be. They were particularly concerned that this big acquisition would change the personal feeling of knowing everyone and feeling close, the part that they felt came from being a *family-owned* business.

One manager talked of how she could pick up the phone and call someone in another office and even though the firm had so many offices, she felt Dewberry employees worked hard at having relationships with each other. She said that in other

firms that Dewberry partnered with on projects, that did not seem to be the case.

Stories of the practice of *quality* checking that was done by Mr. Davis were told. Dick Davis retired in the 1980s. After that a quality assurance process was continued and today *quality* is built into the process.

*Care of employees* (often talked about in terms of loyalty) had a strong emphasis with this cohort, and it seemed to be connected to the struggle over the layoffs and the impact that having to lay people off had on employees and on the firm. Also, since employees in this cohort had survived the layoffs, they expressed a tremendous sense of loyalty to the firm. The other reason cited for a feeling of loyalty was that employees witnessed the rewarding and promoting of employees from the ground up into top leadership positions in the firm.

The CDE feature of *family-owned business* was mentioned to have occurred when Mr. Davis retired and Sid Dewberry became the only remaining founder. At that point the firm became solely owned by the Dewberry family. This group also emphasized that even though the firm had grown, the fact that Mr. Dewberry still came to work every day made it seem more personable as a company than other firms that were not a *family-owned business*.

#### *CDE Features Identified by Those in the 1990s Cohort*

For the 1990s, three individual interviews were conducted as well as two focus groups: one with managers who joined the firm in the 1990s and one with nonmanagers who joined in that time period. *The Dewberry Way* book called this decade “Winning Combinations” and mentioned the following events during this decade.

In the early 1990s there was a recession, and Dewberry's land development business was hit hard. Due to the growth in the transportation industry and the work for FEMA, the company was able to survive this tough time period. Unfortunately, however, some employees needed to be laid off due to lack of work. The firm made some small acquisitions and continued to diversify its portfolio of services. A decision was also made to create an outside board of directors.

#### *Data from the 1990s Cohort*

Among the events discussed in the book, the following significant events were discussed by this group as being significant:

- The founding of the firm in 1956 (*land development, integrity, client focus, quality, growth*)
- The winning of the HUD contract (*growth, diverse capabilities*)
- The loss of the FEMA contract (*client focus, growth, diverse capabilities*)
- Acquisition of Goodkind & O'Dea (*growth, diverse capabilities*)
- The first major layoffs of the 1990s (*care of employees*)
- The transition to nonfamily executives (*family-owned business*)
- The creation of a board of directors with board members outside the family (*family-owned business*)

Table 4-3 shows how the cohort of employees who joined the firm in the 1990s reflected on the CDE features of Dewberry and significant events.

**Table 4-3**  
**Quotes Describing CDE Features from the 1990s Cohort\***

CDE feature	Quotes
<b>Care of employees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sid expects loyalty from people. I think that has now become institutionalized, too, in the firm. He knows people come and go, but he expects people here to be honest, to work hard. Hard work is probably one of the highest. When Sid talks about traditional values, traditional values means that you come to work to work—and work hard. Through that hard work is how you achieve and succeed and outdo your competition. . . . Some of the culture is the Thomas Edison maxim of success, or whatever it is, or genius is 1% inspiration, 99% perspiration. That is Dewberry in spades. [SM]</li> <li>• Another thing that’s quite endearing about the company, probably, is the fact that we work—I would say all the senior managers of the company work 24/7. . . . It’s endearing because they let you in. They let you into the family. [SM]</li> <li>• Our focus on training: It says a lot about the in-house training and the whole setting up a training coordinator and all that. . . . That must be a differentiator. [NM]</li> </ul>
<b>Client focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The client is . . . king. . . . We want the quality product—but we want the product that he wants. [M]</li> <li>• We’ve been able to keep the core clients because that is our backbone. And strategically we can go after one or two new a year and not chase the dollars [through request for proposals] like a lot of other firms do. And they get in trouble doing that, because then there’s just a project. That’s not a client. [M]</li> <li>• I think that they cared . . . most about their clients, I believe, and how the clients perceive them. [M]</li> <li>• Every time I interact with Sid, all of them, and the other managers, in every meeting, we always talk about clients, client focus, and that has been further inculcated because we have client focus awards. . . . So we really are client focused. We really do think about the client, and the people that do not think about the client do not tend to stay here too long. [SM]</li> <li>• The attribute that I think has made Dewberry successful that, I’m sure it came down from Sid, is customer service, that concentration on meeting the customers’ needs and doing what the customer needed to be done and going at it the way that you are going to have good customer relationships. [SM]</li> <li>• The client requirements have changed us and are changing us. There’s probably more change in the last 5 years than I have heard—since I haven’t been here that long—in the previous 40. Some of that has to do with business philosophy changes of our clients, but it also has to do with the constantly accelerating rate of change. [SM]</li> </ul>
<b>Diverse capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dewberry is probably one of the most if not the most prominent FEMA contractor for the last 30 years in terms of design and the types of FEMA projects we do—disaster relief, debris management, all these kinds of things, flood plain mapping. [SM]</li> <li>• You can find your niche. You come in in federal programs, and that’s not what you’re looking for; we’ve got transportation over here, GIS and</li> </ul>

CDE feature	Quotes
	<p>water resources and all these different things that you can try. I did that as well when I came back. You can find your niche, where if you went to another land development firm, that's all you got. [M]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you look at other A/E firms, they may have GIS but it's dispersed among all of their— They call it dispersed, departmental disbursement. They have each of their little organizations. It's not necessarily a business line. I think that's where we're different from most of the other A/E firms that are out there. [M]</li> <li>• Technology had a lot to do with it. . . . [Dewberry] went out and they changed. They changed their people. They changed their business. They changed their technology. And now, they're stronger now than they ever were. If they would have won [the FEMA contract], they may have not have ever gotten it to that place. [M]</li> </ul>
<p><b>Family-owned business</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think our business culture was different. I think being family-owned had a lot to do with that. Dewberry, I think, was seen as being very deliberate about how they made their investments. Some of these larger, especially public firms, they have a different business objective. Dewberry was trying to say, "In this space, this is what we want to be known for, and we're not out to conquer the world or become one of these 50,000 strong, nationwide, international companies. These are the sort of core values that we have, the core competencies that we have. That's how we're going to base our business against." [M]</li> <li>• When we first came on, . . . the decisions were made by the Dewberrys. It was still kind of more of a family imprint on how things were done. Obviously, they made decisions about how they were going to invest their money. They saw this as a means to get return on their investment. I've heard this several times throughout my career here, is that if they wanted to, they could probably just take--they could just sell the business; take that money, and make more money in the stock market or whatever they wanted to do. But that's not what they wanted to do. So they have a philosophy that they want to improve their country and do things that are good for this Virginia area, you know, with their name. [M]</li> <li>• You see him [Sid Dewberry] driving in. You see him in the elevator. . . . We talk about that culture that is, you know, the hard work . . . , how you advance in the company is because Sid comes to work every day. That's the <i>epitome of what Dewberry is</i>, that our owner is here <i>every single day</i>. That's how much he cares, how much he's committed to the firm. [M]</li> <li>• What keeps it different is the family ownership. And if it becomes just like any other firm and it only looks at an employee in terms of production, then I think it loses its essential quality, which is about people bringing in their own unique features to the job. [NM]</li> <li>• Mr. Dewberry is so dedicated to his company that he still comes every day, which, as an employee, that is very important to see that that his company is that important to him. And he is very friendly. I mean, he is just down to earth, very, very friendly. [NM]</li> <li>• From a family-owned, it is becoming more like a corporate structure. . . . It is evolving into what is the natural evolution process for any company these days as to make itself leaner and meaner. [NM]</li> <li>• There was a steady move as the owners began to, were more conscious of the distinction between them as people and the companies. . . . The</li> </ul>

CDE feature	Quotes
	<p>current ownership group have worked diligently to allow [a transition] to occur. . . . They are exceptionally fine leaders and people—and that is part of the process, especially that, is picking who will lead the organization on that day-to-day basis. . . . This is difficult, by the way. When you are the founder of an organization and it is your baby and you are completely immersed in every detail . . . , to allow others to run and decide some of the things and do the things is not easy because it requires trust. [SM]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most of the big A/E firms we deal with are publicly owned companies and the pressure there is very short term. . . . Dewberry does not take that kind of approach to things. We can look out over the long-term. . . . The Dewberrys understand that this is a cyclical business. [SM]</li> <li>• Because we are family-owned company, there is no opportunity for investment in the company. You do not have the same type of buy-in by employees that you can get in these privately owned companies that are owned by management or owned by ESOPS, or even public companies where the owners, where the employees have a pretty quick route to become owners of the company. . . . It's a sticking point as far as recruiting. [SM]</li> <li>• They wanted someone to not just come to work for the firm but to essentially become part of the extended family. [SM]</li> </ul>
<b>Growth-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is still a lot of freedom to grow here that does not exist in a lot of other A/E companies that are management-structured and, maybe, it is mainly us. Because, one, we have been very successful; two, nobody stood or challenges us most of the time on a national basis; that there is a lot of freedom for us to grow. [M]</li> <li>• I think growth is an important value to Dewberry. [SM]</li> </ul>
<b>Integrity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loyalty, integrity. Making sure that you believe this is the right thing to do. I think they very much respected those types of— It's not one of these things where you're given a job and you're just told to make a buck. [M]</li> <li>• In the '90s, we had a lot of verbal contracts, and I think it was because our clients knew Mr. Dewberry personally or they knew his reputation and they felt comfortable doing business with him. [NM]</li> <li>• People here, especially the higher up you go, I do not find people hiding the ball. I find people very open and forthright about whatever we are involved with, whether it is a situation, maybe, where it is somewhat embarrassing, they still are honest. They try to dig down and find out what it is. . . . I think that is helpful and it is one of the reasons I like Dewberry. I like Dewberry because you are not asked to do things that are unethical or illegal. [SM]</li> <li>• Ethics are important to Dewberry; we do not condone dishonesty or working under the table. We want to be very above-board in everything we do. I think honesty, not only in dealing with clients and bribery and things like that, but honesty between people in the organization and the groups, since Ron took over the business; he's very ethical and believes in that. [SM]</li> </ul>
<b>Origin as a land development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We were not solely a land design firm but I think at that time, if I recall, it must have been around 30% or one third or more of the company's business. And that was important. The reason for that is because Sid</li> </ul>

CDE feature	Quotes
<b>firm</b>	Dewberry made his name and built the company initially through services to the land developers, to the real estate boom that occurred in Northern Virginia and the Washington metropolitan area. So that gave him the ability to grow, have the profits. And then he began to diversify. [SM]
<b>Quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="519 373 1429 453">• Sid . . . raises the bar high. . . . That leads to a really pretty high level of excellence. . . . When he says, “We believe in excellence,” he really does. He does not believe it, he demands. [SM]</li> </ul>

\*Since participants were assured anonymity, codes are used to indicate group: M, manager; NM, nonmanager; SM, senior manager. Managers and nonmanagers were interviewed in separate focus groups, and senior managers were interviewed individually.

### *Summary Analysis for the 1990s Cohort*

All of the same CDE features were mentioned by this group that were mentioned by the first two cohort groups. The interpretation of these features was the same with a few variations. These will be discussed in the next few paragraphs.

*Growth-oriented* was mentioned in the 1990s as an important CDE feature of the company, but in comparison to the previous groups, it was not emphasized as much. This could be attributed to the fact that the 1990s started off with a recession and the first major layoffs in the organization’s history. These layoffs posed a serious threat to the survival and *growth* of the firm. Employees who started to work at Dewberry during that timeframe saw an organization that was dealing with survival while at the same time moving forward with an emphasis on *growth* as part of that survival.

*Care of employees* was discussed in terms of hard work and recognition and increased opportunities as part of the reward for that hard work. The mentioning of *client focus* grew stronger with each decade up to this cohort group and could be tied to the emphasis on *client focus* in more formalized communications, training, and recognition and reward programs over the years that employees mentioned. This group mentioned the

transition from being run like a *family-owned* business to being more professionally run by adopting a board of directors.

*CDE Features Identified by Those in the 2000s Cohort*

For the 2000s, one individual interview was conducted (with CEO Ronald L. Ewing, who started with the organization in 2002), as well as two focus groups: one with managers who joined the firm in the 2000s and one with nonmanagers who joined in that time period.

*The Dewberry Way* book called this decade “Transitions,” primarily due to the change in leadership and the plans for succession that have been put in place. The following events are key for this decade up to this time period. As John Fowler was preparing to retire, a nationwide search brought Ronald L. Ewing to the firm as chief operating officer, where he was groomed to be the next CEO and the second nonfamily member after John Fowler to take on this role. The firm made more acquisitions, including a large architectural firm that increased Dewberry’s stature as well as the firm’s geographic footprint into the Midwest. One new goal in the strategic plan was to be seen as one company instead of a group of acquired firms. Thus, the initiative of “One Dewberry” was created. The board of directors influenced the firm to become more of a professionally operated organization as opposed to an informally operated family-owned business.

*Data from the 2000s Cohort*

In this section, I review the employees’ perceptions of the CDE features (see Table 4-4). They mentioned many of the significant events addressed by other cohorts, such as:

- The founding of the firm in 1956 (*land development, integrity, client focus, quality, growth*)
- Winning the HUD contract (*growth, diverse capabilities*)
- The rebuilding of the Filene Center at Wolftrap (*integrity*)
- Hiring of John Fowler (*growth, diverse capabilities*)
- Acquisition of Goodkind & O’Dea in 1989 (*growth, diverse capabilities*)
- The first major layoffs of the 1990s (*care of employees*)
- Hiring of Ron Ewing (*family-owned business*)
- Starting the board of directors (*family-owned business*)
- Loss of the FEMA contract
- Acquisition of PSA in 2004 (*growth, diverse capabilities*)

**Table 4-4  
Quotes Describing CDE Features from the 2000s Cohort\***

CDE feature	Quotes
<b>Care of employees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That is the amazing part of starting a business like that in that era—that it was all hands on deck, everybody participated; even the spouses of the engineers who worked in the office got into the act. In many respects it was a close family relationship and maybe it was a little bit more liberal, but I think people also worked very hard and very long hours and you might have taken an afternoon off here and there but you worked plenty of weekends and brought a lot of work home and that sort of thing. [M]</li> <li>• I have heard . . . about how much fun they used to have when it was smaller. . . . Generally that it sounds like things were just much tighter. It was a smaller organization and people spent more time together outside work. [M]</li> <li>• The fact of our size, we do provide opportunity to employees. If for some reason—either due to their own personal desires and needs, as well as</li> </ul>

CDE feature	Quotes
	<p>maybe their significant other’s desires and needs—they feel they need to do something else, whether it’s a change of career, a change of geography, we are able to offer alternatives today, . . . I think that is important. —Ron Ewing</p>
<b>Client focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think that client focus is something that Sid believed in. That was why he was so successful, and I think even today, we stress that. You know, we stress it in our awards program. We stress it in our strategic plan. We talk about it in our tactical plans. We talk about it in our training. We talk about it in our audits. It’s something that is just a thread through all of our business processes. —Ron Ewing</li> <li>• FEMA at that time was moving into doing more with computers, websites, etc. And there was nobody there to step up, so Dewberry took the initiative to step up to provide that additional service. And to have Dewberry then become looked upon as the go-to people for technology. [M]</li> </ul>
<b>Diverse capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The other thing that made Dewberry different from other A/E firms was the mix of work. Unlike some of our peers, we are very diverse. —Ron Ewing</li> <li>• [The move from being a local firm to being a national firm] has been a huge evolution of changes of identity. I think, again, our identity today is I really feel like we have a national presence in federal programs; a national presence in facilities, architecture in the markets that we serve. I feel like we could go anywhere in the U.S. and be competitive, if we chose to be. —Ron Ewing</li> <li>• With the diversity we are small enough but big enough that individuals get a lot of potential for diversity. I’m in traditional engineering but I can also do work for federal programs and I also do work for other offices. . . . [Engineers in other companies] do not really get to step outside of that or get to do other things or to cross-pollinate. [M]</li> </ul>
<b>Family-owned business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is interesting about Dewberry is that we are becoming a fairly good-sized company but yet we are still family-owned, and I think we may be the largest family-owned engineering firm in terms of ENR [<i>Engineering News Record</i>] rankings. . . . I think it probably helps to explain some of the things that we wrestle with as a company, which is trying to become modern and sophisticated and growing and larger client base but has a family-owned orientation with a very small executive community that includes just family members. There are probably challenges there that are different than challenges that other firms have. [M]</li> <li>• [If Dewberry were not family owned], I think there would be much more of an orientation toward the bottom line. . . . Within this company, there is more flexibility to experiment, to do things from a professional perspective that may be a little more leeway than you would at a company which would be much more focused on the bottom line. [M]</li> <li>• From what I understand, the management investigates pretty carefully who they determine they are going to bring on board as part of the Dewberry family, which is really nice because it keeps that family atmosphere so we do not get lost in the big corporate shuffle. [NM]</li> <li>• I think the direct family investment into it means that they want to continue taking pride with it; they are not handing it off to some</li> </ul>

CDE feature	Quotes
	<p>conglomerate who just cares about making money. They are investing in the people that work here to make it a family-friendly place for everybody, I think. [NM]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even though we have grown, we still feel small, so we still feel close to each other. I do not think there are many companies you can go to and almost know everybody, whether it is just by name because you have talked to them on the phone or by sight, and have access to your CEO whenever you need to. [NM]</li> <li>• To bring somebody in from the outside [as COO] that potentially was in the line to become CEO, I'm sure it was a major decision on behalf of the family, because it . . . was a real risky decision. —Ron Ewing</li> </ul>
<b>Growth-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The best thing that ever happened to us was losing the FEMA contract because, all of a sudden, we had to become responsible for who we were and the work that we did, and we had to make money, and we had to have good products and value-added out there. I think that whole change set a dynamic motion. [M]</li> <li>• The word that I would use is “growth”—not necessarily flexible or as adaptable because they are kind of set in their ways. . . . But they grow and they eventually adapt but it is not very flexible. [NM]</li> </ul>
<b>Integrity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [One thing] that came up even during my interview process was integrity. And to this day, this is what I love about Dewberry the most is we have integrity from our business practices to our engineering practices and everything. [M]</li> <li>• I never felt at risk because I always felt that I was going to get a decent decision and an honest decision from people. [M]</li> <li>• People [in the community] knew of Sid Dewberry. They knew of Dewberry's influence in the development marketplace. On occasion, they would talk about the business ethics. They stand behind what they do. They've got a very good reputation out there, a good name out there in the community. —Ron Ewing</li> <li>• One of the things that they tell me during our client audits is that the thing they like about Dewberry is they stand behind what they do. “When they say something, they're going to do it.” “I don't have to worry about it.” “They'll stand up.” “If they make an error, they're going to stand behind it. They're going to correct it.” —Ron Ewing</li> <li>• In my conversations with all of our ops managers, it's very consistent, and it's easy then to make the decisions, because we do have this sort of guiding principle, if you will: “Does it look right? Is it legal? From a business perspective, does it make sense? If it appears in the newspaper tomorrow, what would Sid say about it? What would my mom say about it?” —Ron Ewing</li> </ul>
<b>Origin as a land development firm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The one common thread has been land development. And even to this day, you know, Sid struggles with the fact that we've only got 200 to 300 people working in land development. He'd like to see half the company be in land development. That's a big frustration for him. —Ron Ewing</li> </ul>
<b>Quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ..so making sure we get things done on time and that it was a quality product. [NM]</li> <li>• I guess the quality of work just from knowing other people who worked</li> </ul>

CDE feature	Quotes
	for other engineering firms.[NM] • . . . making sure that what we did was the best work.[NM]

\*Participants from the focus groups are not identified, since they were assured anonymity. Codes were used to indicate their group: M, manager; NM, nonmanager. Mr. Ewing gave his permission to be identified.

### *Summary Analysis of the 2000s Cohort*

This cohort, as well as the 1990s cohort, placed more emphasis on the transition of the organization from being primarily *family run* to having a board of directors and two CEOs who were not family members. They also talked about the original CDE features and the future direction of the firm.

This cohort discussed the changing demands of their *clients* as the impetus that pushed Dewberry to make major investments in technology. Losing the FEMA contract because the firm could not meet FEMA’s technology requirements was a big blow to Dewberry. The company then worked hard to make changes to technology to make sure they were able to meet the new federal requirements. They also went after contracts with other clients so that they had a more diverse client base. Dewberry was used to relying on its *relationships with clients* for repeat business, and losing this contract was considered “a wake-up call” that forced them to reevaluate their capabilities and their client base. The *growth-oriented* CDE feature was seen to be a differentiator for the firm, especially in trying to enter new markets and gain new clients through acquisitions.

*Family-owned business* was a major discussion point with this group of employees. They believed that family ownership affected the way the Dewberrys did business and feel that there would be much more emphasis on the bottom line if it were not family owned. It was also mentioned how this can be a negative feature when recruiting, because in most other A/E firms, employees were used to having ownership in

the firm at a certain level of management. This was seen as something that was a major differentiator for Dewberry from other A/E firms. The family ownership was in direct conflict with offering other types of ownership that were seen to be more typical in the A/E industry, particularly on the architectural side of the business.

Mr. Dewberry's daily presence at the firm was also something that people saw as a differentiator. They did not believe that other owners had as much passion and commitment to their company as he did. To them, his presence made the company more personable than the other "corporate conglomerates" that they came from and described.

As mentioned, this group of employees talked more about the transition to nonfamily members with the appointment of John Fowler and later Ron Ewing to be CEOs. They also talked about the creation of the board of directors and the impact of that on the business as a *family-owned business*. Their focus on this transition to being a professionally run organization can be attributed to this being a major initiative when they came to work for the firm as well as the fact that they had prior experience working with firms that were not family owned.

#### *Primary Significant Events Mentioned by All Cohorts*

Several significant events (and the CDE features that they represented) were mentioned in all cohort groups:

- The founding of the firm in 1956 (*land development, quality, client focus, integrity, growth*)
- The HUD contract (*growth, diverse capabilities*)
- Hiring John Fowler (*growth, diverse capabilities*)
- The acquisition of Goodkind & O'Dea (*growth, diverse capabilities*)

- The first major layoffs of the 1990s (*care of employees, concern for growth*)

These significant events were seen to have the most impact on helping to further the *growth* and *diversification* of the business. They were also seen as turning points in the history of the firm since each of these events changed the course of the company and how it adapted to the external pressures put on it for survival.

The founding of the firm was based on a loan that Sid Dewberry was able to get based on his *integrity*. The business was founded on good *quality* practices, emphasis on building *client relationships*, and then plans to help it *grow* and succeed in the *land development* industry.

The HUD contract gained the firm entrance into the federal government arena. John Fowler brought transportation industry experience that strengthened the firm's presence in transportation. He was instrumental in helping the firm with its first major acquisition of Goodkind & O'Dea, a firm with a strong presence in transportation, which not only increased its capabilities but gained new presence and new clients in a different market and different part of the country. Both the FEMA contract and the transportation business helped the firm survive the recession of the 1990s that heavily impacted the land development side of the business. This diversification helped the firm grow and survive and provided increased opportunities for its employees.

#### *CDE Features Mentioned by All Cohorts*

The CDE features over the years as mentioned by all cohorts are summarized in Table 4-5.

**Table 4-5  
Overview of CDE Features Mentioned by All Cohort Groups**

<i>CDE Features</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Care of employees</i></li> <li>• <i>Client focus</i></li> <li>• <i>Diverse capabilities</i></li> <li>• <i>Family-owned business</i></li> <li>• <i>Growth-oriented</i></li> <li>• <i>Integrity</i></li> <li>• <i>Land development firm</i></li> <li>• <i>Quality</i></li> </ul>

The CDE features in Table 4-5 surfaced in conversations about the most significant events in the organization. The CDE features of *diverse capabilities* and *family-owned business* surfaced in the 1980s and have remained. The other features have been present since the founding. Through acquisitions, the firm has increased its presence in different markets and acquired *diverse capabilities* of services and talent. Since Sid Dewberry became the sole remaining founder in the 1980s, the business has been established as a *family-owned business*. The firm established a board of directors in the 1990s and has an established plan for succession on the board of directors within the Dewberry family.

**Organizational Identity: CDE Features as Described in Documents**

To answer subquestion 2, “How are the CDE features of the organization represented in the official histories of the organization?”, I reviewed 15 documents from the company records from the 1970s to 2008. Eight CDE features consistently emerged from the analysis of these documents. *Care of employees, client focus, growth-oriented, integrity, and quality* were the most commonly seen. The 15 documents and the CDE features that surfaced are shown in Table 4-6.

**Table 4-6**

### CDE Features That Emerged from Document Review

Document	CDE features
1. Company marketing brochures, circa 1970s	Growth-oriented Client focus Land development
2. <i>Dimensions</i> , Dewberry's external newsletter to clients, Winter, 1981	Growth-oriented Client focus Diverse capabilities Care of employees
3. Article in <i>New Dominion Magazine</i> , Nov/Dec, 1988	Growth-oriented Client focus Integrity Land development
4. Company marketing brochure, circa 1991	Care of employees Client focus Diverse capabilities Growth-oriented Integrity Land development Quality
5. <i>InnerDimensions</i> , Dewberry's internal newsletter, spring 2000	Client focus Growth-oriented Integrity Quality
6. <i>Business Profile in CE News for the Business of Civil Engineering</i> , September, 2003	Client focus Diverse capabilities Growth-oriented Integrity
<i>The Dewberry Way: Celebrating 50 Years of Excellence</i> , 2006 7. Book; 8. DVD	Care of employees Client focus Diverse capabilities Family-owned business Growth-oriented Integrity Land development Quality
9. Dewberry strategic plan, December 2007	Care of employees Client focus Diverse capabilities Growth-oriented
10. Dewberry's website as of July 29, 2008	Care of employees Client focus Diverse capabilities Growth-oriented Integrity Quality
11. Performance Development Plan	Care of employees

Document	CDE features
(Dewberry's performance appraisal process), revised July 12, 2006	Client focus Quality
<b>12.</b> Manager's Policy Manual, revised December 2004	Care of employees Client focus Integrity Quality
<b>13.</b> Employee Handbook, revised December 2004	Care of employees Client focus Integrity Quality
<b>14.</b> Dewberry Quality Manual, July 1, 2007	Client focus Quality
<b>15.</b> Dewberry Code of Conduct, 2008	Client focus Integrity

These CDE features are briefly described in the subsections below, with examples of how the CDE features were described in the documents.

#### *Growth-Oriented*

The CDE feature of being *growth-oriented* focused on Dewberry as a large interdisciplinary organization that had an expanding geographic footprint and offered a *diversity of services*. This feature was present from the earliest of the documents reviewed, i.e., the company marketing brochure from the 1970s, document number 1. Document 2, which is a company newsletter from 1981, covers the story of the firm's 25-year anniversary. The current building was opened in 1981 and was part of the celebration of the firm's anniversary. This building marked the *growth* of the firm, since prior to its opening, employees were housed in several buildings because they had outgrown the old building, next door to where the new one was built. Document 4, a brochure from the 1990s, talked about how the firm had grown from a six-person studio to a larger organization. "We've grown into a nationally recognized design firm, with nearly 1,700 personnel."

The company's strategic plan, developed in 2007 as the most recent iteration of a 5-year plan, will take the firm through its strategies until 2012. This plan shows *growth* as a continued emphasis for the firm. Typically, *growth* over the years is described in each brochure and/or article as the number of employees and number of offices. Growth was either organic, moving to areas where the firm had clients and wanted to open offices, or through acquisition. Until the 1980s, the *growth* of the firm was primarily organic. In the 1980s, the firm began to grow through acquisitions. Sometimes the purpose of the acquisition was to open new offices in a new geographic area; at other times it was to acquire new capabilities.

#### *Diverse Capabilities*

The *diverse capabilities* identity claim was also evident as a CDE feature, since the reference to being an *interdisciplinary* organization that had a *diversity of services* reflects the meaning of a firm with *diverse capabilities* (from document 1, the 1970s marketing brochure). Document 2, the company newsletter, also referred to the *diverse capabilities* of the firm as one of the reasons for its success. Document 4, the brochure from 1991, showed a historic timeline of the firm with mention of the *diverse capabilities* and services. Document 7, *The Dewberry Way* book, highlighted all of the firm's acquisitions and the *diverse capabilities* that were also acquired as well as the winning of the HUD contract.

Document 9, Dewberry's Strategic Plan, emphasized the quest for diverse capabilities. An excerpt from goal one showed that the firm planned to "increase revenues . . . through acquisitions and new project offices to augment Dewberry's

services in existing locations and to expand offices and services into new locations throughout the United States.”

The *diverse capabilities* feature has been represented over the years as the varying disciplines within Dewberry, i.e., land development and surveying, planning, transportation, architecture, and disaster planning and recovery services. The firm’s capabilities expanded considerably in the 1970s with the winning of the federal HUD contract. Then in the 1980s the transportation business expanded due to the acquisition of the firm known as Goodkind & O’Dea in the Northeast. The early 2000s brought the purchase of the architectural firm PSA, which considerably strengthened the Dewberry company’s presence in architecture. This feature of *diverse capabilities* evolved over the years, changing Dewberry’s identity in the marketplace depending on where the firm had offices and the capabilities offered in those offices and geographic areas.

#### *Client Focus*

Similarly, *client focus*, listed as a key feature in all 15 documents, was present as early as the 1970s. The marketing brochure from the 1970s explained that “personalized service” was a central characteristic of the firm, with projects assigned to a project manager who followed each detail and reported to the client on a daily basis. Stating that “personalized service” was a central characteristic of the firm showed that it was seen as a central or core characteristic at that point in time.

Document 2, the newsletter about the opening of the new building, showed *client focus* as a CDE feature. The newsletter indicated that core clients were present in the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the firm. Document 4, a brochure from the early 1990s showing the timeline of the firm, mentioned:

Throughout our many years of practice, our foremost objective has been to provide clients with the highest quality services [*client focus*]. This focus has been a strong, enduring foundation for our firm, from which the qualities of creativity, knowledge, sound judgment, and the conscientious representation of our clients' interests [*client focus*] have been fostered.

This statement shows that *client focus* was seen as a CDE feature of the firm in the 1990s as well. Document 9, the strategic plan written in 2007, talked about organizing to more efficiently *meet the needs of our clients*. It also referred to goals in relationship to keeping core clients and conducting client audits.

Document 11, Dewberry's performance appraisal form, listed client relations (*client focus*) as a core competency for employee performance measurement. The competency was defined as "develops and maintains effective internal and external client relationships. Anticipates client perspectives and needs, strives for client satisfaction, provides an effective and timely response, meets or exceeds client's expectations."

Dewberry's Manager's Policy Manual and Employee Handbook had a policy on client relations that addressed the CDE feature of client focus. An excerpt from the policy manual stated:

Dewberry is a service-oriented firm. The firm's goal is to serve our clients as rapidly and efficiently as possible. The clients' goodwill toward the firm and confidence in the firm are essential to our success. Dewberry constantly strives to enhance the firm's relationship with our clients. The firm has established some broad guidelines regarding client relations for all employees: [three of the seven guidelines are listed below]

1. Clients shall be treated with respect, honesty, and fairness;
2. Clients shall be given full value for every service provided by the firm;
3. Client requests shall be responded to as promptly as possible.

*Client focus* was a consistent feature across the decades. It was talked about as one of the biggest differentiating features of the firm in comparison to its competitors.

Building relationships with clients and putting clients' needs first was the overarching theme.

### *Integrity*

Document 3 from 1988 explained how the *integrity* of founder Sid Dewberry had become a CDE feature of his firm. One of the examples was based on the story of a project at Wolftrap, an entertainment complex in Northern Virginia, where a beam fell a few years after Dewberry had worked on building the outdoor theater. Sid Dewberry offered to pay a settlement, even though it turned out to be a faulty weld that caused the beam to crack, which was outside of Dewberry's control.

Document 6 mentioned that "the 1600-person firm has a strong foundation based on *integrity*, loyalty and honesty." *Integrity* was listed as part of what was celebrated through the Harold Williams Award discussed in Document 5. It was also listed as one of *The Dewberry Way* features in the brochure from 1991, in document 7, and also on the company's Internet, document 10. Therefore, the CDE feature of *integrity* has been around since the founding years through the present. It was referred to as "intellectual honesty" in some cases, which meant that the firm would market and accept jobs based on its capabilities and technical competence in a given discipline. It also meant being highly ethical in all of the day-to-day dealings with clients and others. The company's Ethics Policy was included in the Manager's Policy Manual and the Employee Handbook. The Code of Conduct was included in a separate section on the Intranet. The policy started off saying, "Dewberry strives to maintain the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct as a Company." Procedures and duties regarding ethical conduct were then specifically defined.

## *Quality*

An example of the CDE feature of *quality* was also the Harold Williams Award for Excellence outlined in the internal newsletter (Document 5 above). Harold Williams worked for Dewberry for 20 years until his death in 1987. The newsletter explained the award:

The award recognizes employees who have demonstrated excellence [*synonymous with quality*] in managerial and leadership skills, quality work products, marketing skills, dedication to the firm and profession, mentoring of young people, and integrity.

Quality was listed as a core competency for employee performance measurement on Dewberry's performance appraisal form. An excerpt is below:

Quality: Demonstrates consistently strong performance and achieves results that meet or surpass client standards and expectations through work products and behavior. Supports Dewberry quality programs and strives to preserve the firm's reputation for quality work. Performs all work with safety awareness.

Dewberry's Quality Manual also emphasized the importance of quality in the firm and the high expectations for employees in regard to following quality guidelines.

The Dewberry Quality Management System (QMS) is a firm wide program that outlines the operating procedures to be used to achieve a consistent high level of quality and includes methods for monitoring compliance and procedures for continual improvement to enhance quality, productivity and client satisfaction.

*Quality* was also stressed as an important distinguishing feature in two other document sources, i.e., *The Dewberry Way* book and the company Internet site.

## *Care of Employees*

Document 4, the brochure showing the company timeline, and Document 10, the company website that also shows the timeline, made reference to the Dewberry Institute

that started in 1984. Document 10, the company website, highlighted all of the CDE features mentioned above as well as opportunities for employees, which shows the *care of employees* and their professional development.

The Dewberry Learning Center has a state-of-the art training facility located in the Fairfax office. Traditional classroom training sessions are taught almost every day on subjects ranging from Project Management to technical subjects in both architectural and engineering fields.

The fact that the Dewberry Institute was founded in 1984 indicates that this CDE feature of providing learning opportunities for Dewberry employees has existed for over 20 years and has become an important differentiator for the firm. Opportunities for employees are also listed on the company Internet in terms of job postings and in testimonials from current employees, who mention that there are many opportunities in the firm because of its size and diverse capabilities.

*Care of employees* was also shown as a core competency for management employees as part of Dewberry's performance appraisal process. The competency referred to as professional development was defined as follows:

Professional Development: Identifies and develops the skills of employees. Encourages additional training in areas that can enhance an employee's skill set. Provides ongoing feedback on employee's progress in this area. Makes good use of company mentoring and coaching programs.

It was also evident in the Manager's Policy Manual and the Employee Handbook under the section called "Employee Relations." The policy statement maintained:

Dewberry recognizes that our employees are our most valuable resource. The firm seeks at all times to enhance working conditions and develop human resources to the end that the firm can enjoy a reputation that attracts and retains the most capable people in the profession.

One of the philosophies under this policy stated, “Training employees so that they may develop and grow in knowledge and experience, and so that they may improve their professional standing.”

Other policies that reinforced the *care of employees* in regard to their professional development were the tuition assistance program and reimbursements for professional memberships, professional licenses, and outside educational seminars. Policies created to help employees manage their work-life balance focused on flexible work arrangements and schedules to accommodate their needs.

### *Relationships Between the CDE Features*

The 50th anniversary documents (Documents 7 and 8) and the website also stressed the CDE features and distinct history of Dewberry. Document 7, *The Dewberry Way* book, had many quotes that could be used to illustrate these claims. One example was from John Fowler, past CEO of Dewberry: “Twenty two years later, that *quality* is still very much in evidence in the strong *client focus* and service orientation of Dewberry” (Dewberry & Brown, 2006, p. 96). This quote shows quality and client focus as CDE features of the firm.

Another quote from the book shows the two identity claims of *care of employees* and *client focus*: “The value of our employees to Dewberry is not to be underestimated or taken lightly. Today, good people mean everything in a world where relationships with clients have become paramount” (Dewberry & Brown, 2006, p. 96).

Such distinct features of the organization were clearly recognized by external parties as well. The business profile published in *CE News* (Document 6) linked the CDE features of growth, client focus, and integrity:

By blending old-fashioned values with cutting-edge technology, Dewberry, a Fairfax, VA-based professional services firm, has achieved a striking balance between its growth and its clients' satisfaction over the company's 47-year history. The 1600-person firm has a strong foundation based on integrity, loyalty, and honesty.

“The Dewberry Way,” written by Sid and Barry Dewberry, clearly articulated the principles and behaviors that Dewberry was committed to in its day-to-day practices.

These features were also highlighted in the 50th anniversary book and DVD and are repeated here from the website:

Since its founding, Dewberry has held to a few time-tested principles that have served us well:

**Client First.** We keep our client's big picture objectives in focus as we serve them first and foremost.

**Our People.** They are excellent because we hire and promote solely on the basis of skill, training, ability, attitude, and character.

**Excellence.** Speed like a race car; accuracy like a fine Swiss watch; and dependability because we do what we say.

**Value.** Lower design fees because of our efficiency and low overhead; more bang for the buck in construction costs because of our innovative solutions.

**Teamwork.** We share our knowledge with each other and work together with the client as a team.

**Intellectual Honesty.** We seek the truth in problem-solving, in project management and team communications, and above all, in evaluating our own abilities and performance.

**Traditional Values.** We embrace and practice very simple values: honesty, loyalty, frugality, fairness, professional ethics, dedication, respect for others, family values, charity, community involvement, patriotism, and hard work.

The fact that the company values were referred to collectively as “The Dewberry Way” offered some challenges in identifying CDE features. Often employees would mention them collectively, and other times they would refer to one or other of the values individually. CDE features such as *care of employees*, *client focus*, *integrity*, and *quality* were talked about as being core values of the firm. Other CDE features such as *diverse*

*capabilities, family-owned business, growth-oriented, and land development* were not mentioned as core values in “The Dewberry Way.” Therefore, the researcher listed each CDE feature separately instead of referring to them as “The Dewberry Way.”

### *Family-Owned Business*

The identity feature of a *family-owned business* was evident in the observations. However, in the written documents that were reviewed, the only references to the Dewberry family were in *The Dewberry Way* book. Several examples are provided below.

Use of the single name highlights the continuity that the Dewberry family\_in particular, founder Sidney O. Dewberry\_has brought to the firm that bears the Dewberry name. (Dewberry & Brown, 2006, p. 93)

A quote from Barry K. Dewberry, past CEO, current vice chairman of the board:

The Dewberry family has a lot to be thankful for. . . . The company has provided employment for all of us. The first, besides Dad, was our mother. Reva used to be the bookkeeper of the firm. (Dewberry & Brown, 2006, p. 93)

The book also showed photographs of the board of directors, which included Mr. Dewberry, his sons Barry, Michael, and Thomas, and his daughter, Karen. There were four others on the board who were not Dewberry family members.

In summary, the CDE features of Dewberry were represented in the official histories of the firm through marketing brochures, articles, the company’s internal newsletter called *InnerDimensions*, and *The Dewberry Way* book. The timeline of the company’s history was first published in a marketing brochure in the early 1990s. It was then posted on the company’s Internet. This timeline shows the history of the firm and is available to anyone who accesses the company’s Internet. It maintains a record of the

CDE features and events throughout the company's history that are deemed to be the most important.

The CDE features of *client focus, growth, and integrity* have been consistently mentioned over the years. Other features such as *diverse capabilities* surfaced more strongly after the 1970s when Dewberry entered the disaster recovery business. This feature continues to be mentioned as a strong differentiator for Dewberry compared with other A/E firms. The CDE feature of *care of employees* began to be strongly featured in the 1980s when employees were involved in the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the firm. Other features such as *quality* and the *family-owned business* feature were more specifically mentioned in articles beginning in the 1980s and have been consistent since then. The same is true for the *family-owned business* feature. This CDE feature is not usually used to describe the firm to the external community. It did become more apparent in documents after the 1980s when the company logo changed and after Richard Davis retired and Sid Dewberry became the last of the original founders at the company. This is discussed in more detail in the following section. Not every CDE feature was mentioned in every document, as it depended on the focus of the article or document at the time it was written. CDE features have been presented in response to subquestion 2. CDE features and significant events are highlighted in response to the third remaining subquestion.

### **Organizational Identity: CDE Features in Commemorative Events**

This section addresses the third research question: How were the CDE features of the organization represented in the commemoration of significant events as part of the 25th and 50th anniversary celebrations? It discusses the commemorative events of each

anniversary celebration that represented a gathering of people who were joined together in remembering and honoring the past.

### *25th Anniversary*

Dewberry's 25th anniversary was commemorated by opening a new building, changing the name of the company, and creating a new logo. Each of these symbolic events is discussed in terms of the CDE features that emerged.

#### *Commemoration of the Founding and the First 25 Years of Professional Practice*

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the opening of the firm was a commemoration of the anniversary of its founding as well as the first 25 years of success as an organization. Bringing everyone together, including family members, employees, clients, and government officials, gave everyone an opportunity to celebrate this meaningful occasion. Dewberry had about 600 employees at the time, and there were approximately 1,300 people present at the 25th anniversary celebration. The celebration was highlighted by the groundbreaking and ribbon-cutting ceremony. Including many of their major clients in this celebration also emphasized the firm's relationship and valuing of their clients.

#### *Opening a New Building*

Dewberry's engineers and architects designed and built the new building. It was referred to as being sleek and modern. The new "headquarters building reflects the firm's increasing size and capabilities. . . . The building shows the progression in size and sophistication of the design and technical services offered by the firm" (*Dimensions* newsletter, Winter 1981). This building was to house the 600-plus employees at that time

who were spread around in several different buildings. The firm had grown, and this new building was the manifestation of its *growth* and success. The other CDE feature that was evident was the fact that the firm's own engineers and architects designed the building. This was a testament to the *diverse capabilities* of the firm. The firm was said to be designed in a style that was worthy of a corporate headquarters. Part of the ceremony included a ribbon-cutting ceremony with Richard Davis, a principal and partner of the firm, Sid Dewberry, his wife, Reva Dewberry, the governor, and the Virginia attorney general. Other dignitaries were in attendance as well.

As part of the ribbon-cutting ceremony, congratulatory speeches were given by several government officials, who said how proud they were of the firm's accomplishments and what it had done for Virginia. They referred to some of the significant projects that contributed to the organization's growth and success over the years, e.g., the Dulles Toll Road project, the Flood Insurance Mapping, Lake Braddock, and the Pentagon City project. Sid Dewberry and Dick Davis were presented with a plaque to commemorate their 25th year of professional practice. The firm's impact on *land development* and infrastructure in the surrounding community was recognized. Creating a building with such a professional environment and setting also emphasized the *care of employees* and respect for their professional practice.

### *Changing the Company Name and Logo*

The name of the company was changed from Dewberry, Nealon, & Davis to Dewberry & Davis after the retirement of Jim Nealon. The company logo was changed, and the "berry" symbol was adopted. The "berry" symbol was developed to represent the name of Dewberry. Even though Richard Davis was a partner to Sid Dewberry and the

firm was called Dewberry & Davis, the new logo represented only the Dewberry part of the name, while the old logo was a combined DND symbol after the names of all three owners, Dewberry, Nealon, and Davis. The change of the name and logo was part of the communication “of who we are as an organization” and emphasized and communicated the Dewberry influence and control of the firm not only to the outside world but to its employees as well (*family-owned business*).

### *History*

The 25th anniversary is listed in the timeline of the company’s history (see Appendix A) as well as in *The Dewberry Way* book and other company publications. A photograph of Sid Dewberry and Dick Davis around the time of the 25th anniversary has recently been displayed in the main lobby of the Fairfax headquarters building following the death of Richard Davis in August 2008. Richard Davis retired in 1986, 5 years after the 25th anniversary.

### *CDE Features*

The CDE features evident through this anniversary and the commemoration of significant events during this anniversary celebration are summarized in Table 4-7. The CDE features were important to employees because they symbolized success. *The Dewberry Way* book also mentioned the importance of the fact that Dewberry’s own architects and engineers had designed the building and it was considered to be very sleek and modern at that time. This was seen as a symbol to the surrounding community of its strong engineering and architectural achievements.

### **Table 4-7**

## Overview of CDE Features in 25-Year Anniversary Commemoration

<i>CDE Features</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Care of employees</i></li><li>• <i>Client focus</i></li><li>• <i>Diverse capabilities</i></li><li>• <i>Growth-oriented</i></li><li>• <i>Integrity</i></li><li>• <i>Land development</i></li></ul>

### *50th Anniversary*

#### *Commemoration of the Founding and the First 50 Years: A Celebratory Breakfast*

A celebratory breakfast was held at all of the Dewberry offices across the country on the actual date of the 50th anniversary, April 13, 2006. This day turned out to be Friday, the 13th—just as it was for the day of the founding. Mr. Dewberry said that Friday, April 13, 1956, was “a lucky day.” For the occasion Mr. Dewberry was present at the corporate headquarters, along with his son, Barry Dewberry, and Ron Ewing, the CEO. A video that had been made with speeches from all three was broadcasted to all of the offices. Each of the three men also spoke to the employees via the broadcast that morning. Several long-time clients were present and awarded Sid Dewberry with a commemorative plaque. Breakfast was provided to all employees at each office. Jars of Dewberry jam (because of the “berry” symbol on the logo) were made with a label carrying the Dewberry logo as part of the celebratory event. Mr. Dewberry thanked all of the key clients for the company’s success and thanked all of the employees for their contributions over the years to help make the firm successful. The focus of the meeting was threefold: (1) to honor the past by highlighting key leaders who were no longer with the firm and showing significant acquisitions and projects that had been completed by the firm, (2) to acknowledge the present success, and (3) to look forward to the continued

growth and success of the firm for the next 50 years. The CDE features that surfaced in this event were *care of employees*, *client focus*, *diverse capabilities*, and *growth-oriented*.

### *The 50th Anniversary Gala*

In addition to the breakfast, which was held for all employees, there was a formal evening celebration. This celebration was held in conjunction with the firm's annual meeting at the local Marriott Hotel. In addition to including all of the senior managers and associates, some of the firm's long-time clients were invited. Sid Dewberry played the piano, and his granddaughter performed a dance.

The Awards for Excellence were presented at the meeting. These awards recognize people for the practices of *client focus* and innovation in *quality* design, which emphasize these CDE features of the firm. Again, inviting clients and employees to this celebration shows the emphasis on *care of employees* and *client focus*.

### *History*

A book called *The Dewberry Way* was published to commemorate the firm's 50 years in business. This book is an official history of the firm. It was coauthored by Sid Dewberry. A CD of the book was made, along with a video of scenes from the gala event. Every employee received a copy of the book and CD. The book not only discussed the founding, the former partners, key projects, and acquisitions through the decades, but also featured photographs of all employees at the various office locations around the country, as well as photographs of some of the firm's clients. A map of the United States with photographs of all employees was also posted in the headquarters lobby.

The CDE features commemorated through this celebration and commemoration of significant events were the founders and founding years, the employees, and key clients (showing the identity claims of *care of employees* and *client focus*). The focus on key projects highlighted *diverse capabilities* and the fact that their completion marked a significant event in the company's history. Photographs of the firm's major projects also displayed a pictorial history of its accomplishments. Offices opened through business expansion and acquisitions reflected the goal for *growth* and *diverse capabilities*, which had become identity claims of the firm. Some of the key projects that were highlighted also showed the firm's entrance or accomplishment in more *diverse capabilities* than the *land development* and surveying on which it was founded (see Tables 4-8 and 4-9).

**Table 4-8  
Overview of CDE Features in 50-Year Anniversary Commemoration**

<i>CDE Features</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Care of employees</i></li> <li>• <i>Client focus</i></li> <li>• <i>Diverse capabilities</i></li> <li>• <i>Family-owned business</i></li> <li>• <i>Growth-oriented</i></li> <li>• <i>Integrity</i></li> <li>• <i>Land development</i></li> <li>• <i>Quality</i></li> </ul>

**Table 4-9  
Key Projects by Decade Over 50 Years**

<b>Decade</b>	<b>Key project</b>
1960s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stonehurst, considered a “new townhouse” concept</li> <li>• Montgomery Village, a “planned” community in natural settings in Maryland</li> <li>• Lake Braddock in Northern Virginia</li> </ul>
1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pentagon City</li> <li>• Clarendon Bank &amp; Trust Building</li> <li>• Fair Oaks Shopping Center</li> <li>• Flood Insurance Mapping Project for HUD—the most talked-about project, which opened doors for Dewberry</li> </ul>
1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebuilding of the Filene Center at Wolftrap after a fire</li> <li>• Tysons II Shopping Center</li> <li>• Transportation projects, including the area’s Metro subway system, the Fairfax County Parkway, and the Dulles Toll Road</li> </ul>
1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dulles Greenway</li> <li>• Lansdowne Conference Center</li> <li>• Disaster response to Hurricane Andrew</li> </ul>
2000s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disaster response to Hurricane Katrina</li> </ul>

A significant event mentioned in the context of the 50th anniversary was the fact that 1987 was the firm’s most successful billing year to that date. It was celebrated with a trip to Key Largo in Florida. About 150 key managers were taken on that trip. This trip was also mentioned in the interviews and focus groups, even by those who were not invited or who did not work at the firm at the time. This represented the celebration and commemoration of the firm’s growth and success. Therefore, it highlighted the CDE features of *growth* and *care of employees*, since employees were part of the celebration.

The anniversary also highlighted the firm's *growth*: the opening of new branch and regional offices such as the first office in Maryland in the 1960s; regional offices in Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina in the 1980s; and offices in Tampa, New Orleans, Frederick, and Phoenix in the 2000s. All 12 of the acquisitions completed since 1982 were also commemorated (see Table 4-10).

**Table 4-10**  
**Companies Acquired by Dewberry**

<b>Company</b>	<b>Founded</b>	<b>Acquired by Dewberry</b>
T.O.L.K., Inc. (The Office of Lee Kendrick)	1962	1982
Goodkind & O'Dea	1952	1989
Capitol Engineering Corporation	1945	1993
Philip W. Genovese & Associates	1954	1995
HTB, Inc. (Dewberry Design Group)	1952	1996
Beavin & Company	1955	1997
Frank C. Cockinos	1968	1997
Kniseley & Associates	1988	1998
Anderson-Nichols & Company, Inc.	1934	1999
East Coast Surveyors	1996	2002
Appalachian Surveys	1979	2003
Philip Swager Associates (PSA)	1954	2004

Two of the major acquisitions that were most significant in terms of expanding the firm's diverse capabilities were the acquisition of Goodkind & O'Dea in the Northeast (now known as Dewberry Goodkind), which gained the company preeminence in the transportation arena, and the acquisition of Philip Swager Associates (PSA) (now known as PSA-Dewberry) in the Midwest, which firmly planted the firm into the realm of architecture. New offices and acquisitions also expanded the geographic footprint of the firm.

Three quotes in *The Dewberry Way* (Dewberry & Brown, 2006) highlighted the CDE feature of *care of employees*. The first was from John Fowler, past CEO and current member of the board:

In spite of the many changes that have occurred in our business and the world, there is one fundamental thing about the firm that has remained constant over the past half-century: Dewberry has terrific people. Always has. Always will. That is if we continue to do our job as leaders of the firm. (p. 97)

The second was the book's inscription, which was written by Sid Dewberry, founder and chairman of the board:

To the employees and clients of Dewberry, who together created this company, give it substance and purpose, and have sustained and supported it for a half century. Thank you.

The third is from Barry Dewberry, past CEO and chairman of the executive committee—a quote that also represents the feature of *client focus*:

If I had to point to one group of employees which has been so important to the family, it would be that group of people, located throughout Dewberry, who have been with us for decades teaching The Dewberry Way to others; providing that all important backbone to our company and bringing technical continuity and long term loyalty to our clients. (p. 93)

### *Comparisons Between the Anniversary Celebrations*

The focus of the 25th anniversary was the commemoration of the firm's first 25 years in business and its contribution to the landmarks that imprinted the surrounding community based on its accomplishments. It was also to gather those people together who Sid Dewberry had built relationships with and who had helped the organization become successful. This commemoration served to honor those past achievements together as well as to solidify the expectation for continued and future success. The

outward representation of this event was the opening of the new building and the changing of the name and the logo. These were primarily symbols to the outside world that Dewberry was *growing* and successful—and still had the continuity of two of its founding leaders, Sid Dewberry and Richard Davis. The employees of Dewberry also witnessed the dedication of the new building, change in name and logo and remembered them as being significant and meaningful. Key CDE features represented by the 25th anniversary celebration were origin as a *land development firm*, *growth*, recognition of *diverse capabilities*, recognition of client relationships (*client focus*), and employee contributions (*care of employees*).

The 50th anniversary celebration was much more formal and reflective and included a book that recorded the history of the firm. Some of the same things were commemorated—i.e., the CDE features of the firm as a *land development firm*, the founders, and the goals for *growth* and *diverse capabilities*. The other key CDE feature included in the anniversary commemoration was the *care of employees*. A key message at the 50th anniversary was the leaving of a legacy and the plans for the future success of the organization in terms of a succession plan: Barry Dewberry, who is the chairman of the executive committee, would eventually become the chairman of the board. The message to staff was that the firm was strong enough to continue without the presence of the family (*family-owned business*).

The CDE features that were reflected in the commemorations of the 25th and 50th anniversaries of the firm have been presented as well as a comparison of the two events. The difference between commemoration and history has been illustrated. Commemorations are planned events that gather people together to celebrate a current

event that is also important based on its past meaning, i.e., the celebration of an anniversary event. By commemorating the anniversary together, you also honor the events surrounding the meaning of the anniversary, in this case the founding of the firm and the accomplishments since the founding that are shared in the presence of others to emphasize their importance. Those who participate in this experience together then pass on those collective memories to others. The recorded histories of the firm's significant events are written documents maintained for current and future employees and stakeholders to help them understand how the firm became who it is today.

The next section presents the researcher's observations of several important meetings. One observation was of the company museum. These observations were made to determine if the CDE features of the firm would be evident to an observer in the way that they were presented in the interviews and focus groups, company documents, and commemorative events.

### **Organizational Identity: CDE Features in Observations**

As a means of secondary information and to provide triangulation to the study through analyzing data from interviews and focus groups, documents, and observations, I conducted four observations to get a sense of the environment and how the CDE features of the firm were evident in the day-to-day operations of the business. These included (1) an intern luncheon, (2) a project management training session, (3) a new employee orientation training session, and (4) the Dewberry corporate museum, called the Sidney O. Dewberry Collection of Surveying & Engineering Technology. The subsections below provide a synopsis of each observation along with the CDE features that were represented, and observation summary forms can be found in Appendix E.

### *Observation 1: Intern Luncheon*

The intern luncheon included about 70 summer interns, their direct supervisors, business unit managers, operations unit managers, and some of the human resources staff. Speakers were Sid Dewberry, owner and chairman of the board; Ron Ewing, CEO; and Dell Nunaley, corporate director of human resources. The purpose of the luncheon was to thank the interns for their contributions during their time at Dewberry and to emphasize the reasons why they should want to come back to work for Dewberry in the future.

Mr. Dewberry talked to the group about Dewberry being a place of opportunity. He told them that if they have not decided which area of engineering they want to go into, they could experiment at Dewberry by going into some of the different practice areas. He stressed that Dewberry was a company with *diverse capabilities*, and that made it distinct from other engineering firms. He said the firm was flexible and wanted to ensure that employees were happy in their jobs and that they would find many opportunities if they showed their interest (*care of employees*).

Ron Ewing talked about the opportunities for development (*care of employees*) as well and how young people were the future of the firm. He encouraged all interns to come back and to share their experiences with others who might be interested in coming to work with Dewberry. He emphasized that Dewberry was a stable firm and would *continue to grow*.

Dell Nunaley thanked each of the interns and emphasized the development opportunities that were available. He talked about the recruitment efforts and how important it was to hire and retain key talent (*care of employees*). He too encouraged the

interns to return to Dewberry for future internships and for a job when they finished their degree.

*Observation 2: Project Management Training Session on Client Focus*

This training was part of the core curriculum for Dewberry's project managers (*care of employees*). They needed to complete four sessions over a 4-month time period. Mr. Ewing discussed what was expected of a project manager at Dewberry and stressed the emphasis on *client focus*. He gave examples of *client focus* in the project managers' day-to-day role. He talked about how 80% of Dewberry's business was from repeat business from the firm's core clients and emphasized the importance of maintaining *good relationships with clients*. He shared an experience a client audit meeting in which the client emphasized how he wished everyone could be as *client focused* as Dewberry. He also shared some personal examples, including a time that he did not listen to a client in a previous job and how upset the client was with him. He stressed over and over that the project manager had a critical role within Dewberry. He talked about the importance of *quality* as well.

*Observation 3: New Employee Orientation Session*

The head of human resources gave the first part of the presentation, which focused on an overview and history of the organization, along with organization charts and photographs of the owners (*family-owned business*) and senior executives. This included an emphasis on the *diverse capabilities* of the firm, including *land development*, architecture, transportation, etc. He also reviewed "The Dewberry Way," which lists the company's values and practices, such as *care of employees*, *client focus*, *integrity*, and

*quality*. He took obvious pride in discussing these values and stressed to new employees that the company had been in business for over 50 years and had been a financially stable organization. He emphasized the feature of *client focus* as being one of the mainstays of the organization, whether one was an engineer or architect or a support staff person.

Next, the director of training and development gave a presentation on all of the training and professional development opportunities available to employees, stressing that Dewberry *cares about employees* and their development. A basic safety orientation was given to ensure that people knew what was expected in regard to creating and maintaining a safe work environment (*care of employees*).

#### *Observation 4: The Dewberry Museum*

The Sidney O. Dewberry Collection of Surveying & Engineering Technology holds a collection of surveying and engineering technology. This museum is located off the lobby of the main building at the Fairfax, VA, headquarters of Dewberry. This collection is a private collection of Sidney O. Dewberry.

Many of the tools, books, and maps in this museum are very old and quite rare. Mr. Dewberry had these on display for all employees and visitors to the company to see. This exhibit showed his passion and enthusiasm for surveying and the history of surveying. Surveying and *land development* were the foundation on which the firm was built.

#### *Summary Analysis of Observations*

As in the document review, all of the CDE features represented by the focus group participants were not present in each of the events observed. However, by

combining CDE features that were observed at all four of the events, all eight of the CDE features reported by the focus groups become apparent. The focus of the CDE features depends on the purpose of the meeting. For example, at the intern luncheon, the purpose was to show appreciation to the interns for their hard work and to appeal to them that working at Dewberry would be a good decision for them and their professional development. Therefore, the features that surfaced in that event, *care of employees*, *diverse capabilities*, and *growth-oriented*, were appropriate given the purpose of the meeting.

Since the session observed in the project management training was on the topic of client focus, it was appropriate that *client focus* would be the primary emphasis. Three other CDE features, *quality*, *integrity*, and *care of employees*, surfaced in this session as well, since projects have to meet *quality* requirements, and project managers must make business decisions with the *integrity* of the firm and ethical business practices in mind.

Focusing on the development of employees shows *caring about employees* and wanting to help them succeed. The new employee orientation highlighted the fact that Dewberry was a *family-owned business* and reviewed characteristics of the other CDE features as part of the introduction to the firm.

The eight CDE features found in the observations were the same as those that were present in the focus groups, the document review, and the commemorations of the 25- and 50-year anniversaries of the firm. These features were *care of employees*, *client focus*, *diverse capabilities*, *family-owned business*, *growth*, *integrity*, *land development*, and *quality*.

Next, a summary analysis of all of the data points is provided. The CDE features from each data source are highlighted, and the CDE features across the documents are compared.

### **Summary Analysis of CDE Features from All Data Sources**

An organizational level of analysis was used when conducting the interviews and focus groups. The data represents input from all levels of employees: senior managers, middle managers, and nonmanagers. A cross-section of employees from the various departments and operating units in the flagship part of the organization was also included. As indicated, the CDE features discussed in each of the focus groups and in the interviews with senior managers were the following: *care of employees*, *client focus*, *growth-oriented*, *integrity*, *land development*, and *quality*. The first six features were the ones that employees saw to be the essence of the firm that have been around since its founding. The next two, *diverse capabilities* and *family-owned business*, surfaced in the 1980s and have been temporally consistent since then. For example, *diverse capabilities* became evident in the 1980s with the acquisition of Dewberry Goodkind. The Dewberry family became the sole owners of the firm in the 1980s after Richard Davis, the former partner, retired. These are also features that made Dewberry distinct from other A/E firms in the minds of the employees who were interviewed.

The CDE features that surfaced from the document review were the same. *Client focus*, *diverse capabilities*, *growth*, and *land development* were evident in the early documents. *Care of employees*, *family-owned business*, *integrity*, and *quality* surfaced in the 1980s and have remained part of company documents since then. So these as well as the others are all temporally continuous or enduring.

In analyzing the data that surfaced from the 25-year anniversary, seven of the CDE features cited by the focus groups surfaced. *Family-owned business* did not emerge in the commemorations until the 50-year anniversary commemoration, where the contributions of the Dewberry family were recognized and discussed both in the video that was shown at the commemorative celebration and in *The Dewberry Way* book. *Family-owned business* was seen to be a CDE feature by all cohort focus groups, however, since the presence of the Dewberry family had been evident since the founding of the firm. At the time of the 25-year anniversary, the interpretation of the CDE features was consistent. Growth in the firm was primarily through new work and new offices in Northern Virginia. The new headquarters building reflected the growth in business in the Northern Virginia area. Later in the 1980s, the focus of growth began to move more towards acquisitions.

The three data sources showed remarkable consistency of the CDE features. These three data sources were used to provide triangulation for the study. The fact that all three sources revealed the same information provides a strong case for the reliability and validity of the findings.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings and how they relate to the literature on organizational identity, commemoration and history, and family-owned businesses. It suggests implications for practice and future research.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **DISCUSSION**

In 2006, some fifty years later, clients still place a high value on quality, ethics, excellence, innovation in design, responsiveness and relationships. These characteristics imbedded into the firm from its infancy continue to serve it well. Our clients and our staff are partners from start to finish. —Ronald L. Ewing, CEO (Dewberry & Brown, 2006, p. 99)

This study's purpose was to examine how identity features are commemorated over time and how these features are described in the official histories of the organization as well as recollections of significant events by members of the organization. The study analyzed organizational identity features, i.e., features that are core, distinctive, and enduring (CDE) (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006), that serve to maximize the organization's distinctiveness from other organizations over time (*self-other comparison*) as well as organizational features that are referenced in *self-self comparisons*—in other words, the enduring organizational features that are the most reliable means for organizations to distinguish themselves from similar others (Whetten, 2007). The study was based on two constructs that were the foundation for the conceptual framework. The two main constructs were organizational identity as defined by Whetten (2003) and collective memory, specifically history and commemoration, as defined by Schwartz (2000) as elements of collective memory. A family-owned architectural/engineering (A/E) firm that was founded in 1956 provided the context for the study. The study was intensive in that three data sources were used to provide triangulation of the results. The three sources were interviews and focus groups, a review of historic documents including a review of the 25th and 50th anniversary commemorative events, and participant observation.

This final chapter begins by summarizing the features of the organization that have stayed the same over the years as well as those that have evolved over time. The primary findings for each of the research subquestions and a review of the changes over the decades at Dewberry with key findings are discussed primarily in relationship to organizational identity and collective memory. The study's contributions to the literature in three areas, i.e., organizational identity, collective memory, and family-owned businesses, are then presented. The chapter closes by highlighting implications for future research and practice.

### **Summary of the Research Questions**

The organizational identity features of Dewberry were examined by the events recalled by those interviewed individually and in focus groups and through the review of historic documents of the firm, researcher observations, and the events commemorated by the firm. This study further examined how the core features of the organization endured over time and how they served to distinguish the organization from other firms in the A/E field. It described how the organization continued to examine its identity throughout its 52-year lifecycle.

The second construct of collective memory was examined through the lens of history and commemoration. History and commemoration have contributed to the collective memories of the employees by providing them with a shared biography of what has taken place over the years. The stories that have been passed down about the founding years and some of the significant events have also become part of the organization's official history. The most significant commemorative celebration was the 50-year anniversary celebration. Such significant events not only relay stories; they also

surface CDE features of the organization over time. A brief summary for each of the research questions highlighting these significant events and CDE features is provided in the following section.

*Subquestion 1: CDE Features Recalled by Cohort Groups  
in Regard to Significant Events*

*Significant Events*

In interviews and focus groups, participants recalled the 13 most significant events in the history of the organization. These events were (1) the founding, (2) the acquiring of two jobs on the 1-year anniversary, (3) the splitting off of the partners Greenhorne and O'Mara, (4) the winning of the contract from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), (5) the opening of the new headquarters building in 1981, (6) the retirement of Dick Davis, (7) the hiring of John Fowler, (8) the acquisition of Goodkind & O'Dea, (9) the first major layoffs of the 1990s, (10) the acquisition of PSA, (11) the creation of an outside board of directors, (12) the hiring of Ron Ewing, and (13) the loss of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) contract. The primary significant events, those that were mentioned by all of the cohorts, were the founding of the company; the winning of the HUD contract; the hiring of John Fowler, who brought transportation industry experience and contacts; the acquisition of Goodkind & O'Dea; and the first major layoffs in the 1990s. These were events that were considered major turning points in the organization's history.

### *CDE Features Represented in Significant Events*

According to those interviewed, the CDE features that emerged from these significant events were *care of employees, client focus, growth, integrity, land development, and quality*, and they have been evident since the time of the founding. These features were consistently recounted by members of each cohort decade. This showed temporal continuity and evidence that the features were enduring. As the company became more successful and continued to look for ways to grow the business, acquiring *diverse capabilities* became essential. Each of the significant events represents the features of *growth* and *diverse capabilities*. *Care of employees* was also represented because expanding the capabilities of the firm provided challenging work and opportunities for employees that would help to retain them and their talents. The layoffs of the 1990s threatened the survival of the organization and therefore tested the features of *growth-oriented* and *care of employees*, but the emphasis on *diverse capabilities* helped the firm to survive.

The CDE feature of *family-owned business* was interpreted somewhat differently over the years. After Dick Davis, the former partner, retired, Sid Dewberry became the sole owner of the firm, and the influence of the Dewberry family became more significant. The more recent transition to having a nonfamily member CEO and a board of directors that includes members who are outside of the family has been a threat to the family-owned atmosphere that employees enjoyed. In these two events, the understanding of what it means to be family owned and the applications of this are emerging.

### *Evolution of the CDE Features*

There was remarkable agreement among the senior managers who were interviewed and the members in each cohort group that the CDE features had not changed. Those who started their employment with the firm in the decade of the 2000s recounted the same stories about the significant events and mentioned the same CDE features as those who had been with the company since the 1960s. A few variances in interpretation of these features were noted in the groups. For example, when discussing significant events, those employees who started in the earlier decades, i.e., the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, had a more direct memory of the events as well as the company leaders that had been involved. Yet, the significant events and the CDE features such as *care of employees, client focus, growth, integrity, land development, and quality* were noted by all in their reference to these key events and individuals. Those who joined Dewberry later and did not have direct memory of these events still heard stories—such as how Dick Davis would make people double-check for quality and how Bill Fry applied for and won the HUD contract. And even though Harold Williams passed away in 1987, employees hired in the 2000s could explain the meaning of the Harold Williams Award. Again, this shows that the CDE features stayed the same over time. (The memory of Harold Williams was honored at the 50-year anniversary commemoration as the award bearing his name was given to the 2006 winner.) The award is presented each year at the firm's annual meeting.

*Diverse capabilities* became an important focus of the firm through acquisitions beginning in the 1980s. Some employees expressed concerns about how acquisitions might change the characteristics of the firm that made it seem close and personal.

The CDE feature of *family-owned business* was mentioned numerous times as a key differentiator compared with other A/E firms of the same size and stature. The fact that Dewberry had a long-range view of its business was ascribed to the fact that it was family owned, whereas publicly traded firms were seen to have a short-range view of business based on the fact that they want to make quick profits. Another key differentiator of Dewberry as a *family-owned business* was the fact that Dewberry employees did not have an option for shared ownership, as employees in publicly traded firms sometimes do. Interviewees also mentioned that being family owned gave the business a sense of being more close and personal than firms that were not family owned.

Over the course of the 52 years, the CDE features of *care of employees, client focus, growth-oriented, integrity, land development, and quality* remained consistent. *Diverse capabilities* and *family-owned business* surfaced in the 1980s and remained consistent since then. The meaning of growth-oriented and family-owned business evolved over time.

#### *Tensions Among the CDE Features*

Some tension points were noted among the CDE features when making major decisions about the direction of the firm (Fiol, 2002). Tension points also arose when making decisions regarding the desired amount of optimal distinctiveness for competitive advantage when comparing Dewberry to other A/E firms. These tension points are discussed in more detail when addressing the response to the overarching research question later in the chapter.

### *Subquestion 2: CDE Features in Official Histories*

The CDE features of the organization were represented in company brochures; in an official timeline of the organization's history, which was published in a marketing brochure in 1991 and later published on the company's website; and in internal and external publications. The company's policies and procedures, employee handbook, performance appraisal process, quality management system, reward programs, and strategic plan were all reviewed to determine if the CDE features were evident in these documents that discussed the day-to-day practices of the firm. The three most important findings in regard to the document review were as follows: (1) the CDE features were consistently represented over the course of the 52 years, (2) the features that surfaced in the document review were the same ones that surfaced in the interviews and focus group sessions, and (3) the history of the firm, including all of the important events and people that are part of it, was documented in a book in honor of the commemoration of the firm's 50-year anniversary celebration.

It is significant that the CDE features were consistently mentioned in all types of documents, whether they were internally focused documents written for employees or articles written about the firm from an outside source. The policies and procedures of the firm also clearly showed the presence of the CDE features and the expectation that Dewberry employees were to practice the behaviors that represent these features in their day-to-day work. CDE features that surfaced in these documents and were present since the founding were *care of employees*, *client focus*, *growth-oriented*, *integrity*, and *quality*. The other CDE features that were consistently mentioned were the *land development* origin of the firm and *diverse capabilities*. The *family-owned business* feature did not

surface in documents until 2006 in *The Dewberry Way* book, which was written in honor of the 50-year anniversary. *The Dewberry Way* book was written as an official history of the firm and as a legacy that Sid Dewberry wanted to leave for the future. In that context, it was relevant to highlight the influence of the Dewberry family and to discuss the succession plans and hopes for the continuing success of the firm.

*Diverse capabilities* grew out of the need for the company's survival, especially after the recession in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The interpretation in the focus and meaning of being *growth-oriented* has evolved over the years. The goal for *growth* was apparent since the founding years, however, and was initially evident in the winning of major projects in the Northern Virginia area. The firm enjoyed organic *growth* through the opening of offices in other areas where its clients had work. Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, the firm began to diversify when it was threatened by external changes. It is evident in reviewing the company's history that the firm was founded as a small *land development* and surveying company in Northern Virginia and has grown to be a national firm with *diverse capabilities* in transportation, planning, architecture, disaster relief, flood plain mapping, and other areas. The firm still, however, maintains its early roots as a *land development firm* in Northern Virginia. This shows that even though some features of the firm have changed, those features that are considered central to its identity have remained central.

### *Subquestion 3: CDE Features in Anniversary Commemorations*

The CDE features of the organization were represented in the significant events commemorated in events such as the 25th and 50th anniversary celebrations of the firm. After 25 years in business, the firm changed its name from Dewberry, Nealon, & Davis to

Dewberry & Davis. A new logo introducing the “berry” symbol was created, and the 600+-employee firm moved into its current headquarters location. This anniversary was symbolic in that the name, the logo, and the new building represented success and continued *growth*. Employees had been scattered in several smaller buildings and other offices. With the new building, many employees who had not worked together before learned more about the *diverse capabilities* and services that the firm had to offer. The headquarters office also put employees in closer contact with the owners, Sid Dewberry and Dick Davis, which helped them appreciate identity features such as *care of employees, client focus, integrity, and quality* in a more personal way, with the two owners and founders being role models exemplifying these guiding principles.

In this case, the symbolism of the company name and the “berry” logo emphasized the identity attached to the *land development origin of the firm, client focus, and growth*, as well as the influence of the *Dewberry family* on the firm moving forward, as the logo was created and taken from the name of Dewberry. The former logo was the three letters DND, which stood for Dewberry, Nealon, and Davis, so even though in 1981 the firm’s name was changed to Dewberry and Davis, the new logo only represented the Dewberry part of the name.

By the time the firm reached its 50-year anniversary, only one of the original founders remained. The CDE features of the organization were represented in a celebration for all employees and a gathering of key clients and local politicians to honor the anniversary of the founding of the firm as well as the firm’s first 50 years in business. Honored during that celebration were key employees, key projects, and long-term client relationships that had significantly impacted the organization over the span of years since

it had been founded. The story of the firm's founding was told, which reiterated the *integrity* of Sid Dewberry as the founder. Sid Dewberry borrowed money and worked hard to pay it back by *growing* the business, building *client relationships*, *caring for his employees*, and initiating *quality* plans that shaped the standard for acceptance with Fairfax County and thus helped to differentiate his new, small firm. Also commemorated were the other founding partners and their contributions to the firm, as well as other key leaders. The story of Bill Fry, who won the HUD contract, was told, and Mr. Dewberry also acknowledged the hiring of key people such as Dick Davis, his son Barry Dewberry, John Fowler, and Ron Ewing as the company grew and evolved. These events showed the CDE features of *care of employees*, *growth*, and *diverse talents and capabilities*. He thanked his *family* too and recognized their support over the years and their contributions to the firm.

#### *Looking over the Decades: Response to the Overarching Research Question*

This section presents the response to the overarching research question: How does the interpretation of an organization's identity change over time as depicted in the official histories and commemorations in a 50-year-old family-owned business?

The CDE features of this firm remained consistent over the span of its 52 years in business. Two additional CDE features appeared in the 1980s. The focus or interpretation of these features has evolved. Two of the most notable differences in how the features evolved are in the CDE features of *growth* and *diverse capabilities* of the firm. For example, the firm was founded as a *land development* and surveying firm that developed a strong presence in Northern Virginia in the 1960s with the boom of housing and development that came after World War II. Even though this *land development* and

surveying capability is still strong today, Dewberry has evolved into a company with a broader array of services and *diverse capabilities*. This diversification became strong in the 1980s and has evolved. The emphasis on *growth* was always present since the inception of the firm. In the 1970s the firm won a major federal contract with HUD that took it into different work with the federal sector. In the 1980s the firm opened its first office in Maryland and started a series of acquisitions that put it into different markets with new clients and new or stronger capabilities in those markets.

Acquisitions have become one of the major goals for *growth* since the 1980s as opposed to the early focus on organic growth of moving to different locations to be closer to the clients. The management of the firm began to move toward making acquisitions because they felt the market had become saturated in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. They saw acquisitions as a way to grow by moving into new markets that would help the firm enter new geographic areas as well as to gain additional capabilities in services and staff. Two key acquisitions were the acquisition of a major transportation firm in the Northeast and the acquisition of an architectural firm in the Midwest. Following the first of these in 1989, Dewberry became a dominant player in the transportation arena, with transportation now accounting for about 40% of its business. At that point in time too, the firm gained a broader regional presence up and down the East Coast. It had expanded outside of its early Washington, DC, metropolitan beginnings. Its reputation as a local firm stretched to becoming a regional firm and then from a regional firm to a firm with an increasing national presence. Although the firm cannot yet be referred to as a national firm, the emphasis on growth is to build the firm's

presence and its reputation across the country so that it will become known as a national firm.

### *Changes in Ownership*

In 1968, Greenhorne & O'Mara, two of the founding partners, decided to split off from the firm and agreed to limit their business to the Maryland side of the Potomac River. At that time, Dick Davis became a partner, as he was recognized as a strong contributor who helped the firm differentiate its *quality* and services from other competitors at the time. (He had been instrumental in getting Dewberry's land development and design plans to set the standard for acceptance for development plans approved by Fairfax County.) Jim Nealon, the other remaining founder, decided to leave the firm in the 1970s, which left Sid Dewberry and Dick Davis the remaining partners. Barry Dewberry, Sid's oldest son, joined the firm at that time and eventually became the CEO or managing partner.

In 1981 the firm celebrated its 25th anniversary, opened a new building, and changed its name and logo. The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new building symbolized to the 1,300 clients, politicians, and employees who were present that Dewberry was successful. It also presented the firm as being in a strong position for continued growth and success in the region. Five years after the name change to Dewberry & Davis, Dick Davis retired, leaving Sid Dewberry the sole remaining founder.

### *Tension Points*

As Mr. Dewberry mentioned in his interview, the firm had been trying to establish a stronger presence in architecture for a long time, and the acquisition of architectural firm PSA finally allowed Dewberry to call itself an A/E firm instead of an E/A (engineering/architecture) firm, with the emphasis being primarily on engineering. When looking at its competitors, the firm was in the social category of E/A firms, while it wanted to be able to compete with other firms in the industry that were also known to have a stronger presence in architecture. This acquisition caused tension, however, in regard to the features of *care of employees* and *family-owned business*, because many of the employees in the architecture firm that was acquired had ownership in their previous firm, and Dewberry did not offer ownership. This feature became an issue in this acquisition as well as in other acquisitions.

Dewberry is also a dominant player in the disaster recovery business and earned major recognition in this arena during its response to Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast in the early 2000s. Disaster relief work has been a strong differentiator of the firm since the early 1970s. This has also been a tension point, however, because government contracts have caused the firm to set up certain practices, such as tighter information technology security policies and tighter contract requirements and approvals—in general, more of what Dewberry managers considered to be “bureaucracy” that keeps them from being responsive in getting things done for their clients. The tension point has been between wanting to acquire this type of work with federal clients and maintaining their reputation for *client focus* that provides for best value and efficiency. Now other A/E firms are trying to get into the disaster recovery arena. Dewberry continues to have a

strong presence in this service line, but its competitors are growing. The question of “who are we?” can be multifaceted, depending on the field in which Dewberry is competing and how the firm wants to portray its identity to current and future clients.

The CDE feature of *growth* caused a tension point with the CDE features of *client focus* and *quality*. The firm’s early emphasis on *client focus* and *quality* centered on building relationships with key clients in the Northern Virginia area. The new emphasis is on being seen as a “one-stop shop” as a larger *multidisciplinary* firm that could meet clients’ needs but still provide the feel of a local office that offers *close client contact*, responsiveness, and *quality service*. This new emphasis on cross-marketing has caused tension inside the organization and has caused the firm to have to reconsider how it recognizes and rewards project managers and business unit managers for meeting their profit goals. For example, if a project manager from one office asks someone from another office to help with a particular job, the first office would get credit for the profit and the second office would not. Each business unit had separate profit goals, and this caused internal tensions that could get in the way of client service. Project managers were only responsible for knowing the services and capabilities offered in their business unit or operating unit, not the business capabilities of the entire firm. In order to do cross-marketing, it is important for project managers to understand the capabilities of the entire organization and be able to convince their clients that Dewberry can meet all of their project needs. The CEO wanted to reorganize to better meet the needs of the clients and have more of a seamless offering of services. This reorganization was under way during the course of the study.

*Growth* was a tension point in other aspects as well. When deciding on which proposals to compete for against other competitors, project managers always had to consider the size and reputation of the other firms. Dewberry competed with major A/E players who have as many as 50,000 employees, even though Dewberry has approximately 2,000 employees. Employees were not always sure of which league they were playing in when they tried to decide how they differentiated themselves in the marketplace against their competitors. Dewberry was much bigger than many of the small local family-owned A/E firms. Employees described the firm as being like a “teenager”: too big to play with the small players and not big enough to play against some of the major ones. Another tension point was between *growth* and *care of employees*. Employees expressed concern of feeling lost in a “big conglomerate” and not having the feeling of closeness afforded in a firm where it is easier to know everybody.

The advent of technology radically changed the way the work was designed and achieved. Dewberry was one of the first firms in the area to get computers in 1964 to use computer-aided design methods for accomplishing the work. This helped the firm stand out in its delivery and *quality* of services. As time went on, the investment in technology became increasingly more expensive, and the firm tried to find a balance in how much to invest. After losing a major FEMA contract in the early 2000s, a fork-in-the-road decision had to be made. The decision that was made clarified the emphasis on *client focus* rather than conservativeness and frugality, one that was a mainstay of the company’s financial stability.

At times, there was tension between the features of *client focus* and *care of employees*. Dewberry always prided itself on providing the best value to its clients.

Dewberry also realized that its employees were one of the best means of their competitive advantage (Fiol, 2001). One of the ways the owners felt their firm was distinct was that they had lower overhead costs than other A/E firms, which translated to not having to transfer those costs to clients. This can sometimes mean that employees need to work long hours due to low overhead with support staff. As a result, employees could feel it was hard to find a balance with their work and family life, since they were dedicated to meeting the needs of the client and were willing to work hard to maintain their reputation and the reputation of the firm.

### *Significant Identity Threats*

Two significant events threatened the organization's identity feature of *care of employees*. The first was the large acquisition in 1989, where employees worried about how such a large acquisition would impact the small, personal nature of the company that they valued and had become accustomed to. The second was the first major layoffs in the early 1990s as a result of a major recession in the country.

When employees talked about the layoff in the focus groups, they did not have negative feelings about the owner. It seemed that whether or not they were working with the firm at that time, they knew or had heard that it was a very difficult time for Mr. Dewberry and that he tried everything he could before deciding to lay people off. The identity claim of *care of employees* was very strong, and this was a very sad time in the firm. It was still talked about with pain when people referred to it.

The decade of the 2000s then began a transition of hiring an outside person to become the CEO and to begin to centralize processes and create a "one Dewberry" culture. Such a culture was also threatening to those managers who liked being able to

have autonomy to manage and get things done the way they saw fit. Long-term employees viewed the centralization as a threat to the autonomy and entrepreneurial spirit that they felt made Dewberry successful and also to the family atmosphere in the firm (inertia theory; Whetten, 2007). People expressed that if Dewberry became too much like a corporate entity, it would lose the essence of being a *family-owned business*. This seemed to be a threat to the CDE features of *care of employees* and feeling like “*family*,” which have been differentiators consistently mentioned throughout the interviews and focus groups.

Thus, even though there has been significant consistency in the CDE features over the years, the most significant changes in focus for the CDE features were related to the continued *growth* and *diverse capabilities* of the firm. Other variances included changes in processes that impacted the way the product was delivered and the way that *client's needs* were met, and changes in ownership that led to the business becoming owned solely by the Dewberry family. In recent years, plans for succession have occurred to ensure continuity of the firm's success. These plans have been met with mixed feelings by employees. Overall, however, the CDE features themselves have remained the same. The features that were considered important when the firm was founded were still essential in 2008. The features remained consistent because what was important to the success of the firm in the early years remained important, and these messages were consistently communicated to employees in meetings, in training programs, on the company's Intranet, through policies and procedures, through recognition and reward programs, and through commemorative events.

This section has provided a synopsis of the responses to the three subquestions. It provided the answer to the overarching research question about the interpretation of the firm's identity over its 52 years in business. The next section shows how these findings support and further refine the literature in the areas of organizational identity, commemoration and history, family-owned businesses, and the founder literature.

## **Conclusions and Discussion**

### *Joining the Identity Conversation:*

#### *Albert and Whetten's Criteria for Organizational Identity*

The frequent mention of core values, called "The Dewberry Way," supports Whetten's (2006) theory that "identity claims are likely to be framed as morals and values embedded in well-told stories of the defining moments in an organization's history" (p. 224). Whetten also believed that organizations as social actors create a framework of values for business performance and conduct that persist over time. The stories told by the spokespersons in the Dewberry firm revealed that the CDE features of the firm were recognized at each level, whether the person was at the executive level, the manager level, or the nonmanager level. The stories were also the same for cohorts who joined the firm in different decades.

There was strong temporal continuity in these core features, which supports Whetten's (2006) theory that the features that are core to the organization's identity remain and endure over time. The core values were ingrained in the company's culture and have become CDE features of the firm (Whetten, 2006).

## *Culture and Values*

There is a need to differentiate between organizational identity and organizational culture. “Although conceptually distinct constructs, organizational identity and organizational culture are closely related” (Corley et al., 2006). Hatch and Schultz (2000) described identity as the interrelationship between organizational culture and organizational image. At the same time, organizational identity is distinct from organizational values. When an organization’s identity contains some of its values, it is because these values are believed to be what is CDE about the organization.

In line with the “social actor theory” (Whetten & Mackey, 2002; Whetten, 2006), Gordon (1991) saw organizational culture as being “strongly influenced by the characteristics of the industry in which it operates. Thus, companies within an industry share certain cultural elements that are required for survival” (p. 396). Gordon mentioned three types of variables that drive these characteristics: the competitive environment, the customer requirements, and societal expectations. He maintained that the industry drives the culture and that within a particular industry certain cultural characteristics will exist that would be different than cultural elements found in another type of industry. He also maintained that any changes to an organization’s culture are going to be directly limited to the demands of its industry.

Sarason (1996) said that organizational culture focuses on shared values, while organizational identity focuses on shared beliefs. A difference between values and beliefs is that beliefs are held at a more conscious level than values (Hatch & Schultz, 2000). Barney and Stewart (2000) saw values and beliefs as being directly linked and saw organizational identity beliefs as being founded on values.

In this family-owned business, the values of the founder were embedded in the culture. The identity claims were formed based on what was important to succeed as an A/E firm, and his beliefs about how this should happen were formed at a conscious level but shaped by his values.

The firm adapted in some respects to the demands of the external environment; however, the features that were CDE from the founding years still remained the same. The identity adapted by adding two CDE features as the firm evolved over the 52 years. The meaning of the two features also evolved to meet the demands of the internal and external environment. This confirms Pratt and Foreman's (2000) theory that some elements of identity are not always enduring as Albert and Whetten (1985) sees it, nor always adaptive as Gioia et al. (2000) see it, or evolving as Balmer and Greyser (2003) see it, but can be both adaptive and enduring. Whetten (2006) maintained that the core features stay the same but those features that are peripheral to the core identity of the firm may change without impacting what is seen as being core or essential to the organization's identity. In this sense, there is what is considered to be "adaptive stability" (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Size is an example of a peripheral feature in this case study, as well as some of the organization's service lines or capabilities. These features seemed significant to Dewberry employees when comparing the size and capabilities of the firm in its founding years versus today, yet they agreed that the CDE features that were present at the time of the founding were still present.

### **Key Contributions**

This case study shows that in one organization, the CDE features were remarkably consistent over the course of its 52 years in business. This is a significant

finding in support of the definition of organizational identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006) and particularly Whetten and Mackey's (2002) "social actor theory." The CDE features evolved over time in this organization to adapt to some of the demands of the external environment, yet they maintained their meaning (Ashforth & Mael, 1996).

What helped to maintain these features with such remarkable consistency over this 52-year time period? The researcher maintains that the consistency of CDE features in this organization can be attributed to the fact that one of the original founders has been consistently present over the 52-year time period. This founder has provided consistently strong leadership and communication of values over the years. There has also been significant longevity in the senior leadership group, with several top executives who have been with the firm for over 30 years, as well as other senior-level managers who have a long-term history with the firm. This has provided for consistent leadership and consistency in policies and practices.

The family-owned business component has influenced the business decisions to focus on long-term strategies for success as opposed to short-term profit (Denison, Lief, & Ward, 2004; Gersick et al., 1997). This stable foundation and framework provided a safety net for consistency as opposed to a willingness to bend to external pressures, as companies who are governed and pressured by their stakeholders and/or the stock market have to do (Denison et al., 2004).

This set of circumstances has provided for a company identity that has been remarkably consistent over the years. The CDE features were also embedded in the day-to-day practices of the firm and were evident in the policies and procedures, the employee handbook, the performance appraisal process, the company's code of ethics,

and the quality manual. The fact that these practices were embedded in the policies and procedures made this practice part of the lived experience of the employees (Giddens, 1991; Whetten, 2006). The firm had a tradition of expecting its leaders to coach and mentor their employees and to provide them with challenging work.

The founder's practice of tracking and honoring the history of the firm and the celebration of commemorative events also led to a strong recursive relationship between organizational identity and collective memory (Casey, 1997; Byington, 2007, Casey & Cavanaugh, 2005). The practice of commemoration and history helped to shape and strengthen the identity of the firm. The founder's use of storytelling and narrative helped to keep these memories alive (Czarniawska, 1997; Schwartz, 2000). Commemoration and history are discussed further in the section that specifically highlights those findings.

#### *Identity Issues with Growth, Mergers, and Acquisitions*

Especially when the firm made the large acquisition in 1989 and again in 2004, employees mentioned concerns about the company's family-owned feeling and employee focus being replaced by a "big conglomerate," where they would be lost in the shuffle. They were worried that the organization as they knew it would change and were not sure how that would impact them. This finding supports the theories of Millward and Kyriakidou (2004), Ravasi and Schultz (2006), and Walsh and Glynn (2008) that mergers and acquisitions can pose identity issues for employees and for the firm. Millward and Kyriakidou (2004) maintained that continuing to facilitate employees' career interests helps to reduce resistance during these times of change. This study's findings support this theory. Dewberry employees continuously spoke of the opportunities that were available to them and mentioned management's commitment to coaching and developing them as

well as the training opportunities that were available. This also led to a feeling of loyalty on the part of employees.

After the HUD contract was won in 1974, about 150 or more young people were hired to work on this project. Since they entered the firm around the same time, they seemed to form a bond with each other (Lawrence, 2002). Many of the people hired at that time are still with the organization today. One of the reasons people cited for staying at Dewberry or for leaving and coming back was the bond with coworkers. This is linked with the feeling of closeness and personal ties that employees said gave them a sense of belonging.

#### *Comparisons Between the Past and the Present—with Self and Others*

In accordance with the “social actor” conception of organizational identity (Whetten & Mackey, 2002), the firm engages in an ongoing self-other comparison with other A/E firms in its social category. One of the ways that Dewberry used to ensure that it was being recognized in this category was to watch for the annual reporting of the top 50 engineering firms in the *Engineering News Record*. Dewberry had been listed as one of the top 50 firms for many years, and employees mentioned how important this was to them as well in terms of the company’s reputation among other firms (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). In regard to a self-self comparison, the firm compared its rating from year to year to determine if it had gone up or down and to decipher why. Other aspects of self-self comparison were tracking of profit and growth goals as well as of how many repeat clients Dewberry maintained each year and how much business came from those repeat clients. This self-self comparison also contributed to the enduring aspect of the

CDE features, since the firm was analyzing how much it stayed the same and how much it continued to grow in the areas considered most important (Albert, 1977).

### *Identity and Image*

One of the most significant events discussed in the interviews and focus groups was the opening of the new building at the 25th anniversary, which supports the notion of symbolic identity claims (Hatch, 1997) and also reinforces the theory of Dutton and Dukerich (1991) that shows that employees' views of the company's identity are reinforced by how the organization is seen by others outside of the organization. The new building was a symbol of the organization's success and the identity characteristics of continued growth and stability to the employees as well as to the larger community. Hatch (1997) maintained that managers should not underestimate the power and symbolic nature that physical structure and architecture represent to people and the meanings that they associate with it. She also talked about the symbolism and meaning of logos and how they can have different or conflicting meanings at times.

This finding gives further empirical evidence for the work of Dutton and Dukerich (1991), which showed that employees care about how the organization is viewed by others. The frequent mention of Mr. Dewberry in news articles was also mentioned as being important to employees. This demonstrates that his image as the founder is important to how they feel about working at the company.

Clark's (1972) findings substantiated that historical events play an important role in how an organization's members perceive themselves and what they convey to an external audience. The mission, goal, and belief statements impact how employees see themselves (Swales & Rogers, 1995, p. 227). Some employees felt that the company had

changed, but when pressed the things they mentioned still did not seem to impact the way they saw the features they felt were central and core to the firm. They talked about the firm being bigger, having more of a national than a regional presence, and feeling more like a professionally run organization, yet the CDE features from the early years were still very much in evidence. This finding also supports Whetten's (2006) theory that the CDE features do not change over time, but only those features that are more peripheral to the organization.

### *Hybrid Organizational Identity*

Another key finding was in relationship to the CDE feature of ownership as a *family-owned business*. There is evidence in these findings that the family identity and the organization's identity could be viewed as a "hybrid." The notion of the "hybrid identity" was positioned by Albert and Whetten (1985) as having two types of businesses (systems) that might not ordinarily seem to go together. Albert and Whetten (1985) mentioned that one of the distinctions about identity is how one positions the self to the public versus how one sees the self in private. The Dewberry organization was represented as a privately held firm in its marketing brochures and on its website, but inside the organization the identity of being a *family-owned business* was clearly evident. The family ownership piece was significant to Mr. Dewberry and Barry Dewberry as well as to employees who were interviewed.

In the book, *Generation to Generation: Life Cycles of the Family-Owned Business* (Gersick et al., 1997), it is projected that family-owned businesses employ half of the workplaces in the country. With so many businesses fitting into that category, the authors raised the question as to what made them so special. They highlighted that the firms "are

connected to family and that's what makes it a special kind of business" (Gersick et al., 1997, p. 1). Gersick et al. (1997) concluded that the people involved feel the difference. They maintained that employees can feel the control of the family, and it impacts the day-to-day aspects of the business. The hybrid identity poses a conflict of competing priorities (Gersick et al., 1997; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997) and adds another layer of complexity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gersick et al., 1997; Foreman & Whetten, 2002).

In the interviews and focus groups conducted in this study, family ownership was seen to have advantages and disadvantages. It created a personal atmosphere that generated loyalty and a feeling of closeness. Yet it was stressed that the family ownership prevented the family from offering ownership to others in the company. This was described as a "sticking point" when trying to hire for key leadership positions and when acquiring other firms whose key leaders have had ownership options that would be taken away once the firm was owned by Dewberry. Gersick et al. (1997) maintained that the conflict comes from making financial decisions based on the fact that the business is a legacy for the family instead of on what is best for the business. The relationships with family when involved in these decisions can become strained. It is also harder for family members to separate the fact that it is their father who is the chairman of the board or the CEO because the relationships are multifaceted and complex. Decisions can be looked at as commitments to the welfare of the family as well as to the welfare of the business. Issues of recognition, power, and money make for increased opportunities for tension in the family that brings tension to the business.

Hybrid identity was also described as having a "tripartite identity," with identity claims that are "inviolable, incompatible, and indispensable" based on the nature of the

conflicting identities (Albert & Adams, 2002; Albert, Godfrey, & Whetten, 1999; Whetten, 2006). “Inviolable” in this sense would mean a CDE feature that could not be compromised. CDE features considered “indispensable” would cause a great deal of emotion when trying to change them or get rid of them when making decisions about organizational direction. “Incompatible” CDE features are those that involve competing priorities and cause conflict over decisions regarding resources and future direction.

The CDE features at Dewberry met this tripartite definition of identity. The family-owned business model is an example. The founder and chairman of the board would not agree to employee ownership, and this was not subject to change. Raising this as an option caused strong emotion, since it is an indispensable feature. The feature is at times incompatible with the business models of other firms that Dewberry has acquired or will acquire in the future. Another example is the land development feature. The firm has been a land development firm since its inception, so it would be considered inviolable to the firm’s identity for this feature to go away. It is an indispensable CDE feature. In the newly proposed business model of the firm, three service lines were proposed, none of which included land development as a primary service line. This new model raised strong emotion and resistance from the chairman of the board, because this has been a CDE feature of the firm since its founding. Members of senior management mentioned that this decision caused a great deal of strife within the board when having discussions and making decisions about the future direction of the firm. Incompatible CDE features are those that involve competing priorities, such as acquiring federal government clients and the changes in processes that were seen to conflict with aspects of client focus that those who worked in the land development side of the business were accustomed to.

### **Joining the Conversation on Collective Memory: History and Commemoration**

The key finding in regard to history and commemoration was that when the firm creates an official history and commemorates significant events, the CDE features of identity are key to what elements of the history are recalled and how the stories of these events are told. This finding links history and commemoration with organizational identity by showing how commemoration of past events continues to shape and reinforce the identity of the firm.

The relationship between organizational identity and commemoration and history is recursive. The findings in this study also support the findings of Cavanaugh's study presented by Cavanaugh and Casey (2005) that proposed there was a recursive relationship between organizational identity and collective memory. Cavanaugh's study found that when studying cohort groups, their members did not need to be present to be able to recall significant events that had occurred in the firm because such events were part of the collective memory and history. Ravasi and Schultz (2006) found that the history of an organization was important to reminding employees of what had been important in the past so that they could renew the CDE features of their firm to help them get through a time of crisis. Other authors (Connerton, 1989; Schwartz, 2000; Terdiman, 1993; Wertsch, 2002) mentioned the impossibility of detaching from the past when trying to make sense of the present. Van Rekom and Whetten (2007) too said that "historical accounts show what is important" (p. 11). In this study, even members of cohorts who came after the founding years knew Mr. Dewberry's story of the founding years and stories of other significant events. This was the case because these memories had been shared by others who had either experienced these events directly or heard about them

from others. This shows that the organizational identity characteristics of Dewberry have remained CDE over time.

Commemorating the 50-year anniversary performed the role of “collective memory maintenance . . . that . . . allows memories of the past to remain part of the collective memory” (Gongaware, 2003, p. 486). Gathering all employees and showing a video of the firm’s history helped to commemorate those events from history that were important, because as Schwartz (2000) argued, history recounts the ideal of the events, and these ideals that are documented or narrated are the ones that are typically commemorated through celebrations.

Mr. Dewberry, the only remaining founder of the firm, coauthored the book *The Dewberry Way* and gave a copy to all employees. Writing down the history of the firm helped to surface memories for many of the employees who were with the firm during the different time periods and were present for the events that were documented. The book was written from his memory, not the memories of the other founders, so it is composed of memories that he selected to record as well as from official documents of the firm that he chose to use to help him write the book.

Commemoration is taken from history. The primary role of commemoration is to highlight significant events from history (Schultz, 2000). Commemoration also awakens feelings of the past and “affirms its members’ mutual affinity and identity” (Schwartz, 2000, pp. 9-10). “Commemorative occasions are sites of memory, not history” (Schwartz, 2005). “Collective memories of old events can be saved from extinction, at least temporarily, by new occurrences that bring them to mind” (Schuman & Rodgers, 2004, p.

19). Having people participate in the focus groups together as part of the study also helped them to draw on each other's memories.

This phenomenon supports the theory of Halbwachs (1992) in regard to collective memory when having shared direct experiences. Employees laughed together about some memories and became teary-eyed at others. Those that worked directly with Dick Davis would talk about how he would personally check the plans for *quality*. This helped others understand the expectations of *quality* work. They talked about how Barry Dewberry created a slide show and traveled to the different offices to share information about the company. When asked how they learned about what was important, they often said through "osmosis," which means that they observed it almost unconsciously while watching their managers and coworkers in the actions of their day-to-day practices, processes, and rules (Giddens, 1979, 1984). They also said they learned from watching who gets rewarded and why and through communication in meetings, in training programs, and on the company's Intranet, where policies, procedures, and practices are emphasized.

Bushe (2002) maintained that as organizations pay attention to the needs that individuals have for an appreciation and affirmation of the past before they step into a new future, it will ease the pain during times of company change and transition. He believed that if employees are allowed to let go by honoring past connections, there will be less "resistance to change." Bushe maintained that sometimes managers want to encourage people to forget the past too quickly in times of organizational change. He proposed that the energy that is repressed by doing this makes it hard for people to survive and prosper in their new environment.

There is clearly a benefit to maintaining an organizational history and commemorating key and significant events. It helps long-term employees feel that the past is honored and not forgotten, and it gives new employees a sense of what has gone before them so that they understand the basis for strategy and decision making. In writing the official history of Dewberry, Mr. Dewberry also included a brief history of the firms that Dewberry had acquired. This showed respect for their origins and founders and honored their past memory for employees who had worked for those firms prior to being acquired by Dewberry. It also gave employees of Dewberry an understanding of how the company got to be who it is today.

The message that was crafted at the 50-year anniversary commemoration emphasized Mr. Dewberry as the founder. He talked about the founding years and the history of the firm. Then his son Barry Dewberry talked about how the firm got to be what it is today, and he mentioned some of the current success stories and current state of the business. Next Ron Ewing, the current CEO, spoke about how the past successes got the firm where it is today. He then focused on how those features would take the firm into the future. This seemed to tie the past, present, and future together in a powerful way.

### **Joining the Conversation on Family-Owned Business**

Core findings of this study indicated that the values of Sid Dewberry that became ingrained in the practices of the business impacted the organizational identity and that the family ownership and feeling of “family” was a strong part of the organizational identity.

In reviewing the literature on family-owned businesses, Denison et al. (2004) noted that the behavior of family firms is precipitated by deeply held internal values and

a sense of history rather than external pressures (p. 61). As mentioned, this phenomenon was evident at Dewberry.

Another key finding of the study was that the feeling of family in the firm was strong based on the comments made by employees. This supports the findings of Gersick et al. (1997) that those involved in the family-owned business can feel the difference and can feel the control of the family. Mr. Dewberry expressed the idea that being a *family-owned business* made the firm unique. His son Barry described actions that he took to further personalize the family feeling with employees. Senior managers as well as middle managers and nonmanagers recounted personal stories of how feeling close to “the family” was important to them and was a big factor in the culture of the firm and in their feelings of loyalty.

The issue of being *family owned* also came up in regard to hiring the first CEO that was a nonfamily member, although at the time he had been with the firm for over 20 years and “felt like family” or “was family” because the Dewberrys knew how he thought and knew that he would carry on their values. The presence of Mr. Dewberry as the founder and owner was very significant to the employees at Dewberry who participated in this study. People consistently mentioned that Mr. Dewberry came to work every day; when they talked about the firm to others, they always mentioned this fact. In several instances when the researcher asked what features were CDE, employees said “Sid” (Mr. Dewberry), and there was universal agreement in the cohort group. This reinforces the founder myth that was highlighted by Byington (2007).

Byington’s research showed that the founder myth depicts the founder as benevolent and hardworking. One of the senior managers at Dewberry referred to Sid as a

“benevolent dictator.” Another said, “When Sid says ‘We believe in excellence,’ he really does. He does not believe it, he demands [it].”

Fisher (1984, 1987) referred to the founding myth as part of the American dream with two key elements of individual success and moralistic brotherhood. Deal and Kennedy (1982) discussed how the American hero personifies the cultural and organizational values. One employee in the 1980s manager focus group mentioned that he was intrigued by the fairy tale success of Sid Dewberry, and others emphasized that the culture was strongly shaped by Sid’s presence and influence.

The notion of hybrid identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gersick et al., 1997; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; Foreman & Whetten, 2002), as previously mentioned, was also apparent in the organization, as the Dewberry family identity and the identity of the firm were closely intertwined. This was especially evident in the interview with Barry Dewberry, when he referred to losing employees as being like a “cut.” One of the senior managers also referred to the recent plans for succession as part of coming to terms with Dewberry the family as being separate from Dewberry the firm.

Succession was also mentioned as a frequent concern of employees. Gersick et al. (1997), Aronoff (1998), the Family Firm Institute (2005), and Finelli (2006) mentioned that succession is often the number one concern in family-owned business. Dewberry’s succession plan was not known by all employees. Barry Dewberry, who is the chairman of the executive committee, will eventually become the chairman of the board. Employees frequently mentioned their concern that the Dewberry family would sell the business once Mr. Dewberry was no longer involved.

*The Dewberry Way* book retells the stories of Sid Dewberry. They are the narratives of the organization's history that will persist over time. Williams and Moffitt (1997) maintained that organizational identity is defined as an organization's distinct character discernible by those communicated values manifest in its externally transmitted messages.

The strongest elements of organizational identity at Dewberry seemed to be those evidenced by some of the long-standing values that were ingrained in the organizational practices of the firm and had therefore become CDE features of the organization.

#### *Influence of the Founder and Storytelling*

The reverence, the admiration, and the genuine fondness that all Dewberry employees expressed for Sid Dewberry should be noted. They consistently talked about his "vision" and his passion and commitment to the firm. Employees are dependent on the founder to instill a sense of "vision" (Krackhardt & Kilduff, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). The fact that he still came to work every day showed how much he cared about his company, and that spoke volumes to the Dewberry employees. Senior managers who were interviewed, as well as managers and nonmanagers, told stories of his integrity in action, e.g., the story of Wolftrap and how he wanted to pay money for damages when the roof on the building collapsed even though it was discovered later that the mistake was due to faulty materials and not a lack of quality in the design and construction on Dewberry's part. They talked about how he could seal a deal with "a handshake." When interviewees and focus group participants talked of quality and integrity, they said it started at the top with Mr. Dewberry. Whenever there were critical decisions to be made of an ethical nature, they were always backed up by their managers (and their managers

knew they would be backed up by Sid and others in top management). Clarke's (1972) study confirmed that organizational sagas of this nature that are played out over time in organizations help to create bonds and loyalty.

Also stressed as being important to employees was his genuine kindness and willingness to come to help if you called on him. Employees saw him as a "true father figure" who expected hard work and loyalty. They were in turn willing to work hard because they knew it was expected and they also knew it would be rewarded.

There were frequent mentions of Mr. Dewberry's awards and contributions to the community. At times it was hard to separate Sid Dewberry from the company. However, there are things about Sid Dewberry the man and his involvement in the community that are sometimes separate from the Dewberry company. For example, he was instrumental in starting an urban engineering program at George Mason University. He authored a book about land development that is used in many civil engineering curriculums. He also helped form The Engineers and Surveyors Institute.

Employees mentioned succession concerns that seemed to be less critical once they understood that there was a succession plan in place for the board. They expressed that Mr. Dewberry had selected leaders that seemed to have the same beliefs and values as he had to carry on the business. Schein espoused that "founder and leaders tend to find attractive those candidates who resemble present members in style, assumptions, values, and beliefs" (1992, p. 244). Schein discussed how founders have strong views and beliefs about how things should be done from the beginning. If their assumptions are correct, they can create powerful organizations, and over the years they have many opportunities to embed their assumptions into the day-to-day life of the organization. Byington's

(2007) study showed that the influence of the founder was felt long after he had died. The CDE features that had been present when he founded the organization were still there.

Examples of how storytelling helped to maintain the CDE features were evident in stories told by Sid Dewberry, the founder, and retold by employees over the years. Stories of the founding, the obtaining of the HUD contract, the story of Wolfrap, of Dick Davis and his emphasis on quality, the story of taking managers on a trip to the Florida Keys all emphasized the CDE features of the firm. Gabriel (2000) talked about how storytelling echoes the voice, thinking, and perception of people in the organization by helping to generate and sustain meaning for the stories that set the tone for what is important in the life of the organization. Kaye (1995) and Boje (1991, 1995) maintained that these type of organizational myths and stories are vehicles of communication management. Kaye further maintained that this type of “myth-making” creates heroic and legendary archetypes that serve as role models. Sid Dewberry and Dick Davis, as well as other leaders at Dewberry, were seen as heroes and role models by employees. These stories have been repeated and embellished over time to help to maintain the message of what is CDE to Dewberry’s identity.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to examine how identity features were commemorated over time and how these features were described in the official histories of the organization as well as recollections of significant events by members of the organization. This study analyzed organizational identity features, i.e., features that are CDE (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006), that serve to maximize the organization’s distinctiveness from other organizations over time (*self-other*

*comparison*), and that are referenced in *self-self* comparisons. The literature on organizational identity and collective memory would benefit from additional studies in this area.

The context of this study was a family-owned business. Additional studies on how family-owned businesses document their organizational history and commemorate significant events would be of interest to determine how each family tracks the legacy of the founder and the family involvement through the years. In relationship to the hybrid identity, it would be interesting to determine if one part of the identity surfaced more strongly than the other and how that would impact commemoration and history. In such a case, family-owned businesses would be one of the primary constructs of the study rather than the context of the research. Questions of succession surfaced during this study and have been addressed in other studies (Finelli, 2006; Winter et al., 1998). It would be interesting to see how many firms survive once the founder is no longer involved. Since Wendy's fast food chain lost its founder, Dave Thomas, in 2002, for example, the business hasn't recovered. "Founder Dave Thomas was not just Wendy's image in commercials, he was its soul. . . . They [the restaurants] have lost their Dave-ness" (Horovitz, 2006).

Another lens that could have been used is that of the "hybrid identity" (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gersick et al., 1997; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997, Foreman & Whetten, 2002). This lens is used to discuss family-owned businesses in the context of this study. The relevance of the family-owned business CDE feature to Dewberry's identity was a finding in this study but was not the focus of this study.

In this case study, the researcher narrowed the research to the “flagship” or founding part of the Dewberry organization. It would be interesting to interview employees who are now part of the Dewberry company who were originally employees of one of the companies that Dewberry acquired. Analyzing the change in identity from the firm they were with when they were acquired and the impact of the acquisition by Dewberry on their firm, how they see the identity of Dewberry, and what founding stories and other significant events were known to them would provide an entirely different perspective. It would be interesting to see how much of the Dewberry identity has permeated the culture of the acquired companies and vice versa and whether or not there is a “meta-identity” (Ackoff, 1993), an identity that all members agree to collectively. Studying the “legacy identity” of the firms that were acquired would also lend more to the literature on what companies lose when they are acquired as opposed to focusing on the positive side of what is gained (Walsh & Glynn, 2008).

#### *Suggestions for Researching Organizational Identity*

Surfacing organizational identity is a challenge in research. In interviews, it might be useful to ask how the core features were evident in the policies, procedures, and practices of the organization. This might have provided me with more specific information on examples of those practices. In the interviews for this study, when I asked about how the features affected Dewberry’s decisions and actions, it might have been better to ask for examples of “fork-in-the-road” decisions and the story about these decisions and their outcomes.

Although I thought it was important to interview Mr. Dewberry as my first interview, it might have been better to have saved this interview for later in the study, as

my interview questions became more focused and my skills as an interviewer and researcher increased. I decided to conduct the individual interviews and the focus group participants chronologically according to the decade in which they were hired. I thought it was important to interview the long-term employees first to see how those who came later compared to the ones who had been there the longest. There might also be value to conducting interviews with the newcomers first and then the more long-term employees last. I thought it was important to look at the past, present, and future in that context.

### **Implications for Practice**

Implications for practice that were evident from this research are highlighted below:

1. Company owners/leaders need to appreciate the importance of keeping a documented history about the significant events that have shaped their company over the years.
  - Keeping a history of important events helps to shape the company's identity as well as to highlight to people inside and outside of the company what the firm has considered important.
  - Documenting these significant events helps to contribute to the collective memory of employees and passes down the stories of core values and pivotal moments in the company's history.
2. Documenting events that identify what is CDE to the company creates a common foundation that can help when key decisions regarding the company's identity and future direction are being made.

3. Leaders and managers need to understand the importance of their daily actions and how powerful these actions are in terms of communicating the core values to employees who are witnessing their behavior.
4. Communication to all employees during times of critical events—such as acquisitions, layoffs, key project wins or losses, key hires or retirements, or succession plans—is very important because all employees, regardless of their position, get worried when they perceive that the company’s identity is threatened.
5. During times of acquisition, employees will be less resistant to change if they feel there will be continuous opportunities to advance their career (Millward & Kyrkiadou, 2002).
6. During times of radical change, those organizations with strong identities and a workforce that identifies strongly with the company’s identity will have greater difficulty getting employees to view new possibilities (Fiol, 2002; Whetten, 2007). These changes will need to be portrayed in a way that helps employees see that it will add to the firm’s distinctiveness (Elstak & van Riel, 2005).
7. Maintaining an account of the organization’s history helps long-term employees feel that the past is honored and not forgotten and gives new employees a sense of what has gone before them so that they understand the basis for strategy and decision making (Bushe, 2002).
  - Honoring the past of the firms that have been acquired can also go a long way to helping employees from the acquired firm feel their company’s past is being honored (Bushe, 2002; Walsh & Glynn, 2008).

- Taking some of the positive aspects of the acquired firm's identity to incorporate into the day-to-day practices of the business will also help to reduce resistance from those employees who were part of the acquisition and help them to feel that part of their firm's legacy is not being forgotten (Walsh & Glynn, 2008).
8. Organizational leaders should watch for the dark side of organizational identity to avoid obsessive integration and agreement with the firm's identity, to prevent the need for obsessive differentiation, and to maintain a healthy balance between individual and organizational identity (Jeyavelu, 2007).
  9. Family-owned businesses constitute a hybrid organizational identity that poses opportunities for conflicting priorities (Albert et al., 1999; Whetten, 2006).  
Initiating and maintaining a board of directors that has ample nonfamily members can help to protect the interests of the family and the business (Gersick et al., 1997).
  10. The ongoing passion and commitment of the founder and/or designated successors can continue to instill a sense of loyalty and hard work with employees.

### **Closing Remarks**

The American dream of rags to riches is a powerful story that is reinforced over and over again in our country's history. It is a story of hard work and persistence that pay off for many people in a way that seems like a fairy tale come true. The story of Sid Dewberry as a founder of Dewberry is a story of success based on hard work and, as Sid Dewberry himself likes to say, "a matter of being in the right place at the right time and

taking advantage of opportunities that come your way.” He also believes that opportunities only come your way when you are there putting in your time and working hard.

I have been very fortunate to find a company such as Dewberry in which to conduct my research study. I learned a great deal about Dewberry the company as well as about Dewberry the man. Mr. Dewberry is seen as “the soul or essence of Dewberry” just as Dave Thomas was the “soul” of Wendy’s. Sid Dewberry is working hard to make sure his legacy continues long after he is gone because he hopes, as do many others, that Dewberry never loses its “Sid-ness.”

This study has contributed to the organizational identity literature and collective memory literature by analyzing how organizational identity is shaped. It shows that organizational identity is shaped by history and the events that are commemorated in a firm over the course of its history.

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## **APPENDIX A:**

### **DEWBERRY HISTORY: A TIMELINE**

#### **1950s**

- Dewberry was established in 1956 as a six-person engineering firm. Originally known as Greenhorne, O'Mara, Dewberry, & Nealon, the firm's first office was located in Arlington, VA.
- Sidney O. Dewberry, PE, LS, was a founding partner in the firm, along with James D. Nealon. Dewberry continues as chairman of the board today.
- Early projects included design of the Southeast Relief Water Main in Washington, DC, as well as several suburban communities in Northern Virginia.

#### **1960s**

- The firm's work in residential land development grew considerably. Projects such as the landmark Montgomery Village in Montgomery County, MD, and Kings Park in Fairfax County, VA, were launched.
- Dewberry's early work in the transportation field included runway support system design for Washington National Airport (now Reagan National).
- Computers were first used by the firm in 1964.
- By 1965, the firm had grown to over 50 employees and had relocated to Fairfax, where the headquarters remains today.
- In 1968, the firm was renamed Dewberry, Nealon, and Davis. Richard N. Davis, PE, CLS, had joined the firm in 1958 and was subsequently named a partner.
- The firm opened its first branch office in Maryland.
- Prominent projects included Skyline Center in Alexandria, VA, and Lake Braddock in Fairfax.

#### **1970s**

- The firm pursued growth and an active diversification of services. By the early 1970s, Dewberry began to be recognized for its cartographic services, as well as expertise in architecture and urban planning and design.
- In 1974, the firm was awarded a technical assistance contract for the National Flood Insurance Project. Dewberry continues this and other work for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) today.
- By the late 1970s, the firm had also become a leading regional consultant in municipal and environmental engineering services, program management, and landscape architecture.
- Dewberry now had more than 500 employees and several regional offices throughout Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina.
- Major projects included Pentagon City; the Lake Ridge planned community in Prince William County, VA; the Biological Sciences building at the University of Maryland, Baltimore Campus; and Fair Oaks Shopping Center in Fairfax County.

\*Appendix A is reprinted from <http://www.dewberry.com/profile.asp?id=81>.

## **1980s**

- In 1981, the firm celebrated its 25th anniversary with a name change, a new look, and a new home. The name was changed to Dewberry & Davis; a new logo introduced the “berry” symbol; and the 600+ employee firm moved into its current headquarters location at 8401 Arlington Boulevard in Fairfax, VA.
- The firm acquired the mechanical/electrical engineering firm of TOLK, Inc. in 1981.
- The firm was among the first design consultants in the nation to embrace widespread use of computer-aided design and drafting.
- Beginning in 1981, consulting services to FEMA were expanded to include nationwide response to presidentially declared disasters.
- The Dewberry & Davis Institute, a broad-based professional development program for employees, was launched in 1984.
- Major projects included work for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority; design of the Dulles Toll Road; military projects throughout the U.S. and Europe; the Avenel golf course and community in Montgomery County, MD; the Fairfax County Parkway; Tysons II in Northern Virginia; and surveying and mapping for the White House and national monument grounds. Disaster response work took the firm throughout the U.S. and its territories.
- In 1989, Goodkind and O’Dea joined the Dewberry family of companies. The firm was a major Northeast engineering presence specializing in transportation and civil infrastructure and design, with offices in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut.

## **1990s**

- The firm continued to diversify and expand, with new regional offices and services. Projects included rehabilitation of New York City’s Riverside Drive Viaduct; the Lansdowne Executive Conference Resort in Loudoun County, VA; George Mason University’s Prince William Institute in Prince William County, VA; several industrial projects throughout the Southeast; new educational facilities; pier restoration projects in New York Harbor; and expanded work in mapping, disaster response, and emergency management for FEMA.
- The firm’s leadership in environmental services broadened to encompass wide-ranging services in hazardous materials management, as well as cutting-edge expertise in water resources and coastal engineering.
- Pennsylvania-based Capitol Engineering Corporation was acquired in 1993, followed by Oklahoma-based HTB, Inc; Connecticut-based Philip A. Genovese & Associates, Inc., in 1995; Baltimore’s the Beavin Company in 1997; and Boston’s Anderson-Nichols & Company in 1999. The firm’s employees numbered nearly 1,600.

## **2000s**

- The firm continued to engineer many landmark infrastructure projects, including the SR 288 extension in Richmond; numerous projects for transportation departments in the mid-Atlantic and the Northeast; design-build projects at the Pentagon; major airport and transit improvements; as well as program management initiatives for FEMA and the U.S. Department of Labor.

- John P. Fowler II, PE, who joined the firm in 1983, was named chief executive officer in 2001. Sidney O. Dewberry and Barry K. Dewberry continued as chairman and vice chairman of the board, respectively. Ronald L. Ewing, PE, RLS, joined the firm in 2002 as chief operating officer.
- In an enterprise-wide corporate unification, all Dewberry companies became known simply as Dewberry.
- The Ranson, WV, firm of Appalachian Surveys was acquired by Dewberry. The 19-person practice, established in 1979, provides surveying, land planning, and civil engineering services to both private- and-public-sector clients throughout the eastern panhandle region of West Virginia and in western Maryland.
- Dewberry opened an office in Culpeper, VA, in 2004.
- Dewberry and Peoria, IL-based PSA (Phillips Swager Associates) agreed to merge their architecture and building design operations in the fall of 2004. The new entity is named PSA-Dewberry.
- Ronald L. Ewing, PE, RLS, became Dewberry's chief executive officer in April 2005.
- Dewberry assisted FEMA and other clients in their response to Hurricane Katrina, the most expensive natural disaster in U.S. history. Dewberry established a project office in Baton Rouge, LA, to help coordinate its effort.
- In 2006, Ronald J. Budzinski, AIA, was named president of PSA-Dewberry, the firm's building services affiliate. J. Thomas Seymour was named executive vice president.
- Also in 2006, the firm celebrated its 50th anniversary.
- The Tampa, FL, office opened on August 1, 2006, and the New Orleans, LA, office opened on October 23, 2006. These are Dewberry's 32nd and 33rd offices. The Frederick, MD, location became the 34th official office in February 2007.
- Dewberry today employees 1,870 employees in 34 offices. The firm's billings totaled more than \$240 million in 2005, and sales topped \$300 million for the first time.

**APPENDIX B:**  
**PROTOCOL FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

**SECTION I: Logistics and Demographics**

**Date:**                      **Time:**                      **Start:**                      **Stop:**                      **Location:**

**Interviewee Demographics**

- a. Name:**
- b. Business Unit:**
- c. Job Title:**
- d. Office Location:**
- e. Length of Time at the Organization:**

**SECTION II: Questions**

1. You joined the organization between (indicate the timeframe). Please think back to that time and talk about those early years.
2. When you think of Dewberry in those early years, what adjectives/words would you use to describe what was most important then?
3. What made Dewberry different from other A/E firms?
4. From either your own experience or what you have heard from others, what do you know of the founding years of the organization?
5. What would you say are the most significant features (i.e., philosophy, purpose, attributes, characteristics) of Dewberry?
6. When and how did you learn about these features?
7. How do you see these features affecting Dewberry's decisions and actions?
8. When you tell new employees or others about Dewberry, what do you say?
9. What values are important to Dewberry?
10. How are these values communicated?
11. What features about the organization's identity do you think have remained enduring or consistent over the years?
12. What do you think makes Dewberry distinct from other A/E firms today?

13. What do you think were the most significant events, either internal or external, that have affected Dewberry over the past 50 years? (Or describe two or three critical incidents that have affected Dewberry over the past 50 years and the impact of those events on the organization.)
14. How do you think that Dewberry's identity has changed over the past 50 years?
15. In reflecting on the organization's history, what types of things have been commemorated over time in the organization—for example, during the 25-year anniversary and/or 50-year anniversary celebrations, during training programs, at annual meetings, in publications, etc.?

**APPENDIX C:**  
**PROTOCOL FOR FOCUS GROUPS**

**SECTION I: Logistics and Demographics**

**Date:**                      **Time:**                      **Start:**                      **Stop:**                      **Location:**

**Interviewee Demographics**

- a. Name:**
- b. Business Unit:**
- c. Job Title:**
- d. Office Location:**
- e. Length of Time at the Organization:**

**SECTION II: Questions**

1. You joined the organization between (indicate the timeframe). Please think back to that time and talk about those early years.
2. When you think of Dewberry in those early years, what adjectives/words would you use to describe what was most important then?
3. What made Dewberry different from other A/E firms?
4. From either your own experience or what you have heard from others, what do you know of the founding years of the organization?
5. What would you say are the most significant features (i.e., philosophy, purpose, attributes, characteristics) of Dewberry?
6. When and how did you learn about these features?
7. How do you see these features affecting Dewberry's decisions and actions?
8. When you tell new employees or others about Dewberry, what do you say?
9. What values are important to Dewberry?
10. How are these values communicated?
11. What features about the organization's identity do you think have remained enduring or consistent over the years?
12. What do you think makes Dewberry distinct from other A/E firms today?

13. What do you think were the most significant events, either internal or external, that have affected Dewberry over the past 50 years? (Or describe two or three critical incidents that have affected Dewberry over the past 50 years and the impact of those events on the organization.)
14. How do you think that Dewberry's identity has changed over the past 50 years?
15. In reflecting on the organization's history, what types of things have been commemorated over time in the organization—for example, during the 25-year anniversary and/or 50-year anniversary celebrations, during training programs, at annual meetings, in publications, etc.?

**APPENDIX D:**  
**DOCUMENT SUMMARY FORMS 1–15**

<b>Document 1</b>
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**Document Date: Circa 1970s**

**1. Name and description of document (include author’s name, title):**

A brochure showing information about the company and its services from sometime in the 1970s; author unknown.

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

This booklet appears to be a marketing brochure about the firm when it was called Dewberry, Nealon and Davis.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

This brochure shows the firm in its earlier years when it was still known as Dewberry, Nealon and Davis, even though Jim Nealon had already retired.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

The firm is depicted as a firm of engineers, architects, planners, and surveyors. It highlights key people and projects in each of these disciplines. It also shows that at the time there were six partners including Sid Dewberry, six associates, and four assistants to the partners. There were four offices and 200 employees. It is mentioned that the firm began with six employees and had grown to 200 at that time with offices in Virginia and Maryland serving the East Coast.

**5. Possible quotes to use:**

On page 3 it is mentioned that “Although DND is a large interdisciplinary organization, it provides personalized service for each project. Each project is assigned to a *Project Manager* who is responsible for expediting work assignments, following each detail on a daily basis, and reporting to *The Client*.”

## Document 2

**Document Date: Winter, 1981**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

*Dimensions Newsletter*, Dewberry's newsletter to clients and others outside the firm.  
Author unknown.

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

The 25-year anniversary celebration of the firm's founding.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

This document was sent to all clients, employees, and others on the Dewberry firm's mailing list. It focuses on the opening of the new building, the change in the company's name, and the change in the company's logo.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

The cover story is about the firm's 25-year anniversary commemoration, which was celebrated with the opening of a new building, a change in the company's name, and change in the company logo. There were around 600 employees with the firm at the time who would be moving into the new building. About 1,300 people were present to witness the opening ceremony and ribbon cutting. Several local government officials, including the governor of Virginia, were present to give speeches and to present Sid Dewberry with a plaque to recognize his firm's 25 years in business and its contributions to Virginia.

## Document 3

**Document Date: November/December 1988**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

“The House That Dewberry Built” by Bonnie Jacob in *New Dominion, The Magazine for and About Northern Virginia*. Sid Dewberry is featured on the magazine cover, with the caption “The Magic Touch of Engineer Sid Dewberry.”

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

An article in the special men's section.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

This article shows Sid Dewberry on the cover in a tuxedo with a top hat and cane. It links Sid Dewberry with the growth of Northern Virginia and refers to him as one of the most powerful men in Northern Virginia. Several employees referred to this photo and article and described how proud they were that he is their employer.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

This article is about Sidney Dewberry, his early life, how he founded and manages the firm, his early political aspirations, and some of his community involvement efforts.

**5. Possible quotes to use:**

In her cover story on Sidney Dewberry, the only dirt that Bonnie could uncover was the “sandy soil of rural Southside Virginia in which the roots of Northern Virginia's premier engineer are planted.” Bonnie then tried for conflict; she could dig up no enemies. “Sid Dewberry, it seems universally acknowledged, is a nice guy.”

“ . . . quite simply the Sid Dewberry story is in many ways a symbol for the Northern Virginia story.”

“Both are success stories. Stories of building, of bringing people together, of seeing the future, of humble beginnings, of quiet power that doesn't need to be flashy.” —Walter Nichlin, Publisher, introduction to the cover story.

“He's a kind of senior statesman for our industry, very professional and highly ethical” —quote from a close competitor's owner, p. 1

Sid says in the article, “I don't believe I look at things the way Frank Lloyd Wright might have done and say, ‘I designed that, that's my baby.’ I look at it and say, ‘I participated in its creation.’ It gives me a warm glow, but I don't claim authorship.” —p. 7

Also told the story of Wolfrap, where he requested to pay a settlement even though it turned out to be a faulty weld that caused the beam to crack. —p. 5

What he has is much deeper than charisma, says a former managing principal. “Once you know him, you continue to be attracted because he is a man of substance.” —p. 5

## Document 4

**Document Date: circa 1991**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

Brochure showing a timeline with significant projects from each decade since the founding. Author unknown.

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

It has been said that this was done in conjunction with the 30-year anniversary of the firm.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

Commemorates staff, large projects, significant accomplishments and events, and the expanding geographic footprint of the firm.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

Primarily photographs along with a paragraph or so summarizing what was most important in the firm in each decade. Also listed are the geographic locations, the partners, principals, senior associates, and associates of the firm. On the cover is a photo of Sid Dewberry and his oldest son, Barry. Mentions the growth of the firm, the importance of the employees, and the dedication to clients over the years.

**5. Possible quotes to use:**

“Throughout our many years of practice, our foremost objective has been to provide clients with the highest quality services. This focus has been a strong, enduring foundation for our firm, from which the qualities of creativity, knowledge, sound judgment, and the conscientious representation of our clients’ interests have been fostered.”

“Today, our firm bears little resemblance to the six-person drafting studio that set out in 1956 to provide civil engineering and surveying services in Northern Virginia. We’ve grown into a nationally recognized design firm, with nearly 1,700 personnel . . . yet we have held to the imperative of superior service that originated with that six-person studio.”

“Timelines are specific. They recall separate events, and link them to single points in time.”

“. . . and we expect that our principles of dedication and practice will remain unwavering through the next several decades.”

## Document 5

**Document Date: Spring 2000**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

*InnerDimensions*, published for the employees of The Dewberry Companies. "A Small Town Success Story Makes It Big: For Harold Williams Award Winner Darren Conner, there is truly no place like home."

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

Company newsletter announcing the 2000 Harold Williams Award For Excellence.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

This newsletter was published for all of Dewberry's employees and featured a full-length story about an employee from one of the southern offices who was presented with the Harold Williams Award for Excellence at the annual meeting in March 2000. This is a very prestigious award that is named after one of Dewberry's early principals. Harold Williams worked for Dewberry for 20 years until his death.

In 1987. "The award recognizes employees who have demonstrated excellence in managerial and leadership skills, quality work products, marketing skills, dedication to the firm and profession, mentoring of young people, and integrity."

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

The article talks about Darren Conner, the award recipient, and how important it was to him to go back to his hometown in Southside, Virginia, after graduating from college. It gives the highlights of Darren's career.

Also in the newsletter are announcements of projects, birth announcements, new registrations, a recruitment fair, and two memorial announcements about fellow employees who had died. The winners of the 1999 Awards for Excellence projects were also highlighted.

**5. Possible quotes to use:**

See the above description of the Harold Williams Award.

## Document 6

**Document Date: September 2003**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

*CE News For the Business of Civil Engineering* business profile: "Dewberry: Balancing client interests with the firm's goals" by Holly Bradley

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

Article in the *CE News*.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

This publication is widely read by those in the civil engineering profession.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

It shows photographs of Sidney O. Dewberry, PE, LS, Chairman of the Board; John Fowler II, PE, CEO; Ronald L. Ewing, PE, LS, COO; and Phillip J. Thiel, Director of GIS.

The article highlights Dewberry's success over its 47 years in business and its philosophy of doing business by building long-term relationships with clients. It also talks about Sid Dewberry's dedication to the business and his impact on the company's culture. The company's focus on continued growth and diversification of its services and locations to best meet the needs of its clients is mentioned.

**5. Possible quotes to use:**

"By blending old-fashioned values with cutting-edge technology, Dewberry, a Fairfax, VA- based professional services firm, has achieved a striking balance between its growth and its clients' satisfaction over the company's 47-year history. The 1600-person firm has a strong foundation based on integrity, loyalty and honesty."

## Document 7

**Document Date: 2006**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

*The Dewberry Way: Celebrating 50 Years of Excellence* by Sidney O. Dewberry and Kathi Ann Brown

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

This book was written to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the firm.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

Sid Dewberry, the founder, paid someone to help him write this book, which is a compilation of memories and milestones of his 50 years in business. This book was given to all employees and core clients at the 50-year anniversary celebration that was held at each of the Dewberry offices on the day of the 50-year anniversary of the firm. A DVD was also included.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

The book reflects on the firm's beginnings and the founding years. Through photographs and narrative, it also highlights some of the major accomplishments and key projects from each decade and honors many of the individuals who have come and gone, staff as well as clients. The company values are highlighted with a history of the values written by Sid Dewberry. Also included are the many acquisitions and the names of the companies at the time they were acquired. There are reflections from each of the CEOs, past and present, as well as information on all awards that the company has received and all of the offices and services. There are photos of employees from each of the various offices depicted.

**5. Possible quotes to use:**

From first CEO who was a nonfamily member on pages 96 and 97; *The Dewberry Way* on page 90; and some of the information on each of the decades.

## Document 8

**Document Date: 2006**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

A DVD, *The Dewberry Way: 50 Years of Excellence* by Sidney O. Dewberry and Kathi Ann Brown, produced by Light Year Studios, Leesburg, VA.

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

This DVD was created in conjunction with the book that was written to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the firm.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

Sid Dewberry, the founder, paid someone to help him write a book and create this DVD, which is a compilation of memories and milestones of his 50 years in business. This DVD and corresponding book were given to all employees and core clients at the 50-year anniversary celebration that was held at each of the Dewberry offices on the day of the 50-year anniversary of the firm.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

The DVD reflects on the firm's beginnings and the founding years. Through photographs and narrative, it also highlights some of the major accomplishments and key projects from each decade and honors many of the individuals who have come and gone, staff as well as clients. The company values are highlighted with a history of the values written by Sid Dewberry. Also included are the many acquisitions and the names of the companies at the time they were acquired. There are reflections from each of the CEOs, past and present, as well as information on all awards that the company has received and all of the offices and services. Photos of employees from each of the various offices are depicted as well. It also provides some clippings of the annual gala, which in 2006 was a celebration of the 50th anniversary. This event was held for all associates and executives of the firm.

## Document 9

**Document Date: December 11-12, 2007**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

Dewberry Strategic Plan, Ron Ewing and senior managers, approved by the Dewberry board of directors.

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

Development of the strategic plan for Dewberry from 2007 through 2012.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

Sets the direction and focus of the firm's strategic plans for a 5-year period and gets agreement from all senior management and the board of directors for the areas of focus and use of resources.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

The strategic plan highlights the vision, mission, goals and tactical plans of the firm. It lists the goal champions for each goal and a timeline for when the tactical plans should be accomplished.

The identity claims that are apparent in reviewing the strategic plan are the goals for growth through acquisitions and new project offices, the emphasis on organizing to more efficiently meet the needs of the clients, hiring and retaining a quality workforce to make Dewberry the best in the industry, growing Dewberry through the expansion of traditional and new markets, and meeting adequate financial performance.

Thus the identity claims of growth, client focus, and care of employees are apparent in this plan.

## Document 10

**Document Date Retrieved: July 29, 2008**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

Dewberry's Internet, [www.Dewberry.com](http://www.Dewberry.com)

The company Internet is maintained by the corporate marketing department.

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

The Internet is used as an information and marketing tool for the firm.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

Anyone inside and outside of the organization can access this site by accessing the Internet and going to Dewberry's web page. This site is often one of the first impressions that people have of the firm, particularly when they are applying for or deciding to apply for a position there.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

The website highlights the company's profile, its leadership, a directory of its offices across the county, its services. It includes a pressroom site with featured publications and articles about the firm, as well as various career opportunities. On the first page the company values are communicated, which are known as *The Dewberry Way*. Five events are depicted as highly impacting the organization's success. Key projects and information about newly hired key staff are shown as well as information on the company's participation in conferences, its professional development opportunities, etc. The historical timeline of the firm is also shown. This timeline is shown in Appendix A.

## Document 11

**Document Date: July 12, 2006**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

Performance appraisal form.

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

Annual performance appraisal.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

Lists goals and performance competencies that communicate to employees what is important for success in their role at Dewberry.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

The performance appraisal form includes three sections. Section A features the current goals and objectives for the job for the annual performance timeframe. Section B lists 10 core competencies that are important to success at Dewberry. Six of these are for all employees, and four are for management employees. Section C lists the performance goals for the next period and the career development plan.

**5. Possible quotes to use:**

Sections on quality, client relations, and professional development.

<b>Document 12</b>
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**Document Date: Revised, December 2004**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

Dewberry's Manager's Policy Manual.

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

Dewberry's policies and procedures for managers.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

Communicates the expectations for behavior at Dewberry.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

This policy manual includes policies on client relations, ethics, employment, harassment awareness, and many aspects of the day-to-day general practices of the firm.

**5. Possible quotes to use:**

Sections focusing on client relations, ethics, employee relations, and flex-time policies.

## Document 13

**Document Date:** Revised, December 2004

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

Dewberry Employee Handbook.

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

New employee orientation: Employees are introduced to the Employee Handbook during the new employee orientation and asked to read it and acknowledge that they have read it.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

This document communicates all of the day-to-day policies and procedures of the firm.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

The handbook discusses client relations, benefits, work hours, compensation, leave policies, employee policies and laws, office procedures, professional development, and safety and emergency situations.

**5. Possible quotes to use:**

Things regarding client relations, employee relations, ethics, etc.

## Document 14

**Document Date: July 7, 2007**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

The Dewberry Quality Manual is a manual that describes all of the company's policies and procedures regarding quality.

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

It is discussed in the new employee orientation.

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

This manual codifies the protocols and tenets that define the core business philosophies to which the staff of Dewberry have been dedicated since its inception. It specifies the core components and standards of the firm's Quality Management System.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

See number 3.

**5. Possible quotes to use:**

The scope statement or the policy statement.

## Document 15

**Document Date: circa 2007**

**1. Name and description of document (include author's name, title):**

Dewberry Code of Conduct, an ethics statement.

**2. Event with which document is associated:**

NA

**3. Significance or importance of document:**

This document communicates the code of conduct expected of employees at Dewberry.

**4. Brief summary of the contents:**

Behaviors that are communicated to be the appropriate code of conduct for employees of the firm.

**APPENDIX E:**  
**OBSERVATION SUMMARY FORMS 1-4**

<b>Observation 1</b>
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**Document Date: July 2007**

**1. Name/description of meeting, program, or place (include presenter's name, title):**

Intern luncheon. Speakers were Sid Dewberry, founder and chairman of the board; Ron Ewing, CEO; and Dell Nunaley, director, human resources.

**2. Event with which the observation is associated:**

A thank you luncheon for college interns who are working at Dewberry in various business units over the summer months.

**3. Significance or importance of the meeting, program, or place.**

This is an opportunity to get all of the interns together to meet each other as well as some of the senior managers of the firm and to hear a consistent message from Mr. Dewberry, the company's owner; Ron Ewing, CEO; and Dell, corporate director, human resources.

**4. Brief summary of observations:**

Mr. Dewberry talked to the group about Dewberry being a place of opportunity. He told them that if they have not quite decided which area of engineering they want to go into, they could experiment at Dewberry by going into some of the different practice areas. He stressed that we are a company with diverse capabilities and that it makes us distinct from other engineering firms. He said the firm is flexible and wants to ensure that employees are happy in their jobs and they will find many opportunities if they show their interest.

Ron Ewing talked about the opportunities for development as well and how young people are the future of the firm. He encouraged all interns to come back and to share their experiences with others who might be interested in coming to work with Dewberry. He emphasized that Dewberry has been a stable firm and will continue to grow.

Dell Nunaley thanked each of the interns and emphasized the development opportunities that are available. He talked about our recruitment efforts and how important it is to hire and retain key talent. He too encouraged the interns to return to Dewberry for future internships and for a job when they finish their degree.

Many of the managers of the firm were present. Not only did the managers who have been supervising the interns come to show their support, but the executives in charge of each of the operating units were there as well. Overall, there were over 70 interns this summer at Dewberry. This was the largest number in some time. Everyone had pizza and sodas and enjoyed the session. Those from the outer offices were together in the conference rooms in their locations and could hear the remarks on the teleconference.

## Observation 2

**Observation Date: October 12, 2007**

**1. Name and description of meeting, program, or place (include presenter's name, title):**

Client focus training module as part of Dewberry project management training. Presenter is Ron Ewing, Dewberry's CEO.

**2. Event with which the observation is associated:**

Dewberry project management training

**3. Significance or importance of the meeting, program, or place.**

This training is part of the core curriculum for Dewberry's project managers. They need to complete four sessions over a 4-month time period. Mr. Ewing addresses the group to discuss what is expected of a project manager at Dewberry and stresses the emphasis on client focus.

**4. Brief summary of observations:**

Ron Ewing is very approachable and is a very energetic presenter. Ron gave examples of client focus in the project managers' day-to-day role. He talked about how 80% of our business is from repeat business from our core clients and emphasized the importance of maintaining good relationships with clients. He shared an experience of going to a client audit meeting and the client emphasized how he wished everyone could be as client focused as Dewberry. He also shared some personal examples of a time that he did not listen to a client in a previous job and how upset the client was with him. He stressed over and over that the project manager has a critical role within Dewberry. He talked about the importance of quality as well.

## Observation 3

**Document Date: July 2008**

**1. Name and description of meeting, program, or place, (include presenter's name, title):**

New employee orientation. Presenters are members of the HR staff.

**2. Event with which observation is associated:**

Employee's first day of work and orientation to the company.

**3. Significance or importance of meeting or event:**

This is the employee's first impression of the company.

**4. Brief summary of observations:**

The head of human resources gives the first part of the presentation, which focuses on an overview and history of the organization. He also reviews *The Dewberry Way*, which lists the company's values and practices, such as care of employees, client focus, integrity, quality, etc. He takes obvious pride in discussing these and stresses to new employees that the company has been in business for over 50 years and has been a financially stable organization. He emphasizes the value of client focus as being one of the mainstays of the organization, whether you are an engineer or architect or a support staff person.

Next the director of training and development gives a presentation on all of the training and professional development opportunities that are available to employees, stressing that Dewberry cares about employees and their development. A basic safety orientation is given to make sure people know what is expected in regard to creating and maintaining a safe work environment.

Lastly, the benefits staff finish up with informing employees about all of the health and medical benefits and what other things are available to them.

## Observation 4

**Document Date: July 2008**

**1. Name and description of meeting, program, or place (include presenter's name, title):**

The Dewberry Museum—collection of surveying and engineering technology. This museum is located off the lobby of the main building at the Fairfax, VA, headquarters of Dewberry.

**2. Event with which the observation is associated:**

This collection is a private collection of Sid Dewberry.

**3. Significance or importance of the meeting, program, or place:**

Many of the tools, books, and maps in this museum are very old and quite rare. Mr. Dewberry has these on display for all employees and visitors to the company to see. This exhibit shows his passion and enthusiasm for surveying and the history of surveying. Surveying and land development are the foundation on which the firm was built.

**4. Brief summary of observations:**

This museum is a small museum located off the main lobby at the headquarters building in Fairfax, VA. On display are old maps, tools, books, and photographs.

There are two glass cases that hold slide rules, compasses, transits, books, etc. Some of the compasses date back as far as 1760, 1790, 1811, and 1860.

Each item has a descriptive label with information and the year that it was created. There are five historic maps on one wall; two are geographical, statistical, and historical maps, one of Maryland and one of Virginia. There is a property map and an atlas of Maryland and the counties of Howard, Montgomery, and DC. There is also a railroad map of Virginia.

On another wall are two glass frames holding information. One gives background on a compass and one on a transit.

There is an oak drafting desk dated from 1920 and a book of place tables and computations with a hand-cranked calculator ca. 1920.

Hanging above one of the glass cases is a photograph from 1934 of the Arlington County Engineering Department, an old wooden sign with Sidney Dewberry, PE.

In the center of the small room is a carpet with a design in the center that resembles a compass.

The room is open to anyone who wants to venture in. This museum is evidence that Sid Dewberry is a man who loves history, loves surveying, and enjoys sharing his passion with others. The company Internet also advertises the museum, and there is a virtual tour and a presentation by Mr. Dewberry about the museum.