THE INTERACTION OF PERSONAL AND SHARED CONSTRUCT SYSTEMS:
THE IMPLICATIONS OF CONSENSUAL VALIDATION UPON
COMMITMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

by

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Personal construct theory is interfaced with systems theory and organizational behavior theory to provide a theoretical framework for understanding interaction of the individual and the work organization. The concepts describing the individual's relationship with the family contribute the basic understandings to the development of this framework as applied to the work setting. The personal construct system and its function to organize a meaningful experience of reality for the individual is compared with that of the shared construct system and its function to negotiate a common view of reality amongst members of the family and work organization alike. It is proposed in this paper that consensual validation acts as an internal consistency criterion which moderates interaction between personal and shared construct systems. Essentially, consensual validation serves as a self-referent process linking the individual to the work organization. Suggestions are made as to the implications of the individual's experience of consensual validation upon organizational commitment in the workplace.
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Chapter I. Introduction

Investigation of the processes affecting individual participation in the workplace has become one of the major domains of organizational research in recent years (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). Academics and management consultants alike have sought to identify what sorts of variables enhance individual functioning and encourage organizational members to behave in ways necessary for the organization to survive in its environment. One variable which has received a lot of attention is organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Arising from the individual’s identification with the work organization and desire to maintain membership in it, organizational commitment has been found to correlate with a willingness to exert extra effort on behalf of the organization (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986). However, it has generally been observed that organizational commitment varies considerably across work settings. Such variance has aroused interest in the interactional dynamics influencing the development of organizational commitment. It is the nature of the interactional dynamics affecting individual involvement in the work organization which assumes the focus of inquiry in the present paper. Observations of the factors encouraging
individual membership in the family contribute to the development of a theoretical framework for viewing individual membership in the work organization. The discussion focuses specifically upon the psychological aspects of individual functioning.

The development of the proposed framework draws heavily upon the personal construct theory of Kelly (1955). While traditionally personal construct theory has focused upon the development of individual conceptual structures and the role of interpersonal relations in this process, more contemporary research has demonstrated its relevance in addressing a wide range of concerns (Adams-Webber, 1981). Topics have included such areas as management of learning (Crosby & Thomas, 1987), business (Brown & Detoy, 1987; Fransella, Jones, and Watson, 1987), analysis of political process (Du Preez, 1975), religion (Todd, 1987), and evaluation of aesthetic experience (Button, 1987; Miall, 1987; O’Hare & Gordon, 1976). The recent application of personal construct theory to the study of relationship development (Duck, 1979) holds particular value in the present discussion.

It may well be argued that personal construct theory has much to contribute to an understanding of the interaction between the individual and the family,
as well as between the individual and the work organization. The integration of personal construct theory with family systems and organizational behavior theories can be found to provide a meaningful analysis of relationship development in the family and work organization. In correspondence with family theory, personal construct theory offers valuable insight as to the concepts defining individual membership in the family (Alexander & Neimeyer, 1989; Proctor, 1981). Likewise, the interfacing of organizational behavior theory with personal construct theory serves to suggest similar concepts governing individual membership in the work organization. Essentially, weaving personal construct theory with concepts defining functioning in the family and work organization emphasizes the centrality of individuals' constructions of reality upon their behavior in a group. Such emphasis implies that the efforts of the family and work organization to guide member behavior are subject to their impact upon self-organizing systems. It is this principle which assumes primary focus in the development of the present theoretical framework.

Background of the Problem

The propositions herein developed draw support from a constructivist epistemology which holds the view
that the way in which individuals choose to act in their world is a function of their construction of a "reality". While discussion takes into account general systems theory, as well as first-order cybernetics, it remains firmly grounded in the notions of second-order cybernetics. Initiated in the work of Chilean biologists Varela and Maturana (1973), second-order cybernetics addresses the role of individuals as observers and meaning-makers. This view regards the individual as an autonomous, organizationally closed system, and in doing so, it departs from earlier systems thinking. General systems theory, as originated by von Bertalanffy (1968), suggests that developing persons and the changing properties of their environment are to be understood as being in a state of continuous exchange. Individuals are placed in a social context which is seen to influence them, as well as be influenced by them. As such, general systems theory supports environmental interaction as the basis for self-maintenance. Founded by Weiner (1948), first-order cybernetics corresponds with this view. It defines the dynamics of stability and change within the system in terms of complex interlocking feedback mechanisms. The evolution of living systems is perceived as a function of the system's adaption to the
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environment or the environment’s selection of the surviving system configuration. Contrastingly, second-order cybernetics considers a process of self-reference to be the basis for self-maintenance. From this perspective, change is viewed as subordinate to the pattern of relations defining the organization of the system. The evolution of living systems corresponds with internally generated change, such that, individuals must couple adequately with the environment or face disintegration. It is these particular notions of second-order cybernetics which inform the current discussion and support the argument that individual transactions with the environment are a function of a self-referent process.

The Problem

The personal construct theory of Kelly (1955) supports the constructivist view that reality cannot be directly comprehended. Kelly maintains that individuals are charged with the task of formulating in their own personal way a system of constructs through which they may interpret the world of events and cope with the unfolding future. This system of constructs is referred to as the personal construct system (PCS). The present paper argues that individual interaction with the social environment is subject to the operation
of the PCS. Critical to such an understanding of the PCS is Kelly's view of individuals as falling under the control of the framework they have created for themselves. Stated simply, individuals anticipate events in the future with respect to their given history. Having drawn from earlier experiences a certain view of self in relation to other, self-referent processes incline the individual to perceive, interpret, and react to the social environment in a way which is consistent with this view. In this way, the operation of the PCS corresponds with that of the self-organizing system (Kenny & Gardner, 1988). The PCS supports the autonomous functioning of the individual, guiding the variety of interactions in which the individual may engage and still maintain a coherent sense of self.

The identification of certain key variables affecting individual interaction with the social environment is provided by an examination of the relationship between the PCS and the constructs defining the social environment. The current discussion assumes that a collective system of constructs, coinciding with the notion of the PCS, can be identified. This interpersonal construction is believed to coordinate the functioning of individual
members of a group, whether this be the family or the work organization. The value in recognizing the shared construct system is that the correspondence of individual constructions with those of the family and work organization as a whole can then be examined.

The development of a collective system of constructs to define group functioning provides a rich understanding of the family's functioning as a unit. Essentially, the notion of a shared family reality serving to shape a coherent identity for the family as a group is delineated. Proctor (1981) suggests such a notion in his development of the family construct system (FCS). Integrating family theory with personal construct theory, he proposes that the FCS provides a basis for agreement within the family about the order and meaning attributed to events. The FCS is seen as defining the family's uniqueness as a unit and expressing the delicate coordination required of family members in order to promote their survival as a group.

This paper argues that the interfacing of organizational behavior theory with personal construct theory serves to suggest a similar interpersonal construction operating in the workplace. Like that of the family, the work organization too is seen to adhere to a shared system of constructs. This set of
constructs is referred to as the organizational construct system (OCS). The OCS is believed to promote mutual understanding amongst organizational members and guide their functioning as a group.

Given the idea of corresponding personal and shared construct systems, this paper examines the individual's relationship with the family as a means of identifying the variables affecting interaction between the two. It is proposed that it is a process of consensual validation which moderates the coordination of personal and shared constructions. Emerging in the similarity with which events are construed, consensual validation is seen to support the coherent functioning of the PCS. Kelly (1955) argues that individuals depend upon others not only to validate their personal constructions but also to maintain a sense of self. It follows that the degree to which interaction with others serves to confirm the relevance of individuals' constructions of reality, thereby providing consensual validation, individuals are likely to form a relationship with the group. Essentially, consensual validation serves as a self-referent process linking the individual to the group.

It is suggested here that the nature of interaction with the social environment is a function
of a consensual validational process in which individuals receive support for the functioning of their PCS. It follows from this general principle that individuals will form a relationship with the work organization to the degree that it serves this vital function. Meaningful social interaction within the work organization, as within the family, is dependent upon the coordination of personal constructions with those of the group. To the extent that individuals are able to reconcile their personal constructions with those of the workgroup, they will secure validation not only for their anticipation of events but also for their view of self. In this way, consensual validation binds individuals to the work organization. If a relationship with the work organization fails to provide consensual validation, the experience of invalidation can pose a threat to the integrity of the PCS and cause disruption of the current relationship.

It is the thesis of this paper that individuals' experience of consensual validation is a major determinant of their formation of commitment in the work organization. More specifically, it is suggested that the individual's experience of consensual validation serves to distinguish amongst the type of commitment developed, whether this commitment be of an
attitudinal or calculative nature. It is argued that individual membership in the work organization, reflective of attitudinal commitment, corresponds with the individual's experience of consensual validation at progressively more central aspects of the PCS.

**Propositions**

As discussed earlier, it is the intent of this paper to provide insight into the fundamental dynamics guiding relations between personal and shared construct systems. Concepts defining individual interaction in the family are used to construct a model for understanding individual transactions with the social environment. This framework is then applied to individual participation in the work organization as a means of defining the factors influencing the individual's formation of a committed relationship. The paper begins with a report of the following propositions:

**Proposition 1:** The PCS of the individual governs the maintenance of a coherent identity (Kelly, 1955).

**Proposition 2:** The PCS guides the variety of interaction in which the individual is able to engage, thereby governing relationship formation with other construct systems (Kenny & Gardner, 1988).

**Proposition 3:** Change is internally determined.
While the PCS is open to constructive revision, sufficient stability of the overall system is required. The introduction of new constructs which are basically incompatible with the system upon which the individual has come to rely for living will be experienced as a threat to the coherence of the PCS (Foley, 1987).

**Proposition 4:** Consensual validation acts as a self-referent process moderating the degree of coherence versus conflict experienced by the individual (Duck, 1979).

Drawing upon the theoretical support provided by these arguments, this paper serves to advance the following propositions:

**Proposition 5:** Shared construct systems are subject to the coordination of individual construct systems. Coordination is a function of a process of consensual validation, in which individuals experience both definition and extension of their PCS when interacting with the shared construct system.

**Proposition 6:** Individual membership in the family is developed through a process of consensual validation.

**Proposition 7:** Individual membership in the work organization, as represented by an attitudinal type of organizational commitment, is a function of the degree
to which individuals experience consensual validation of their PCS in the workplace.

Summary

With respect to the chapters which follow, each attempts to build upon the other to develop theoretical support for the argument that organizational commitment is a function of a consensual validation process. Chapter 2 reviews the principles of personal construct theory as they apply to individual functioning. Chapter 3 extends these principles to the functioning of the family and work organization and develops arguments for the existence of shared construct systems. Chapter 4 examines the process of consensual validation and its role in coordinating personal and shared construct systems. The nature of individual interaction with the family is extended to individual interaction in the workplace. Finally, in Chapter 5, argument for the experience of consensual validation serving to influence the individual’s development of organizational commitment in the workplace is developed.
Chapter II: Personal Construct Theory

This chapter reviews the basic tenets of personal construct theory. Initial consideration is given to the constructivist inclination of Kelly's (1955) theory and corresponding articulation of the individual as a self-organizing unit. This provides a theoretical context within which to examine the nature of the PCS. It is the principles underlying construction of the PCS which serve to identify the self-referent processes influencing the individual's interaction with the social environment.

A Constructivist Approach

An important first step in developing an understanding of individual interaction with the family and the work organization is to identify the 'reality' in which each of these systems operate. The way in which each system will choose to act within the world will be shaped by its construction, experience, and maintenance of a particular reality (Keeney, 1983). It is the distinctions each system draws in its observation of the world of events that lead to the development of different realities (Watzlawick, 1984).

A constructivist epistemology has much to contribute to an understanding of different realities. Supporting the notion that individuals create their own
ways of viewing the world in which they live, constructivism provides a theoretical foundation upon which to ground the arguments developed in this paper. Resting upon the notion that "knowledge is not passively received either through the senses or by way of communication, but is actively built up by the cognising subject" (von Glaserfeld, 1988, p. 83), constructivism may be defined as a theory of active knowing. Essentially, it emphasizes the role of individuals as observers and meaning-makers in the world they inhabit. The function of their particular constructions of reality is adaptive, aiding them in the organization of their experiential world.

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in the elaboration of constructivist epistemologies. Contributions to the field are many (Kelly, 1955; Maturana, 1978; Varela, 1979; von Foerster, 1984; von Glaserfeld, 1984) and may be found to vary in terms of the particular view of 'reality' upheld. In contrast to paradigms premised on the notion of direct access to an objective reality, constructivists agree that complete representation of the real world can never be achieved (Kenny & Gardner, 1988). However, while some appeal to the existence of an 'objective ontological reality' which serves as a potential source of
disconfirmation of the construing system (von Glaserfeld, 1984), others deny the existence of any independently existing reality, referring to reality only in a hypothetical sense (Maturana, 1978).

The constructivist position taken up in this paper is that upheld by Kelly (1955). His theory rests upon the principle of constructive alternativism, the assumption that reality does not directly reveal itself but remains subject to as many alternative ways of construing as can be invented:

What we think we know is anchored only in our assumptions, not in the bedrock of truth itself, and that world we seek to understand remains always on the horizon of our thoughts. (p. 6)

Kelly does not deny an ontological reality, but merely the possibility of an individual acquiring a true representation of it. As such, knowledge is not defined in traditional terms which imply an accurate correspondence between individual cognitive structures and reality. Rather, knowledge is viewed in terms of the construing system "fitting the constraints" of the ontological reality and preserving organizational coherence (Kenny & Gardner, 1988). From this perspective, the real world becomes manifest only where
the individual’s constructions of reality break down. Kelly can be found to hold that the way in which individuals frame their experience is "a function of subjectively construed goodness-of-fit criteria applied to the difference between [their] anticipations and [their] abstracted representations of events" (Agnew & Brown, 1989, p. 155).

The Self-Organizing System

In correspondence with the constructivist position, it follows that Kelly’s (1955) theory of personal constructs can be viewed as an articulation of the individual as a self-organizing system. Given it is the individual’s own anticipations which define the meaning of an event, Kelly’s notion of auto-anticipation can be interpreted to mean auto-organization (Kenny, 1987). Such a position sets the individual system apart as self-stabilizing, self-transcending, and self-evolving (Kenny & Gardner, 1988).

Structure and Organization

Kelly (1955) proposes that coming to understand individuals and the meaning of their behavior requires examination of the structure and organization of the individual system. He suggests that it is a description of whole persons from the perspective of
the persons themselves without reference to the outside environment that is necessary (Foley, 1987). In this way Kelly argues for closure of the individual system:

If we are to have a psychology of human experience, we must anchor our basic concepts in that person’s experience, not in the experience he causes others to have. Thus if we wish to use a concept say of hostility, we have to ask what is the experiential nature of hostility from the standpoint of the person who does it. Only by answering that question in some sensible way will we arrive at a concept which makes pure psychological sense, rather than sociological or moral sense. (p. 122)

Kelly points to the autonomy of the construing system by identifying relations with the environment as internally determined. The structure of the individual system determines not only what will be accepted as an interaction but also whether the interaction will result in self-maintenance or disintegration. Essentially, Kelly contends that the variety of interactions the individual system can undertake while preserving its identity are specified by its organization (Kenny & Gardner, 1988).
Only within his personal system is one ever free to make a choice in his own behalf, and only along the coordinate lines he himself has managed to erect is he ever free to initiate movement. Man’s freedom, then, can be said to have ontological meaning only within the anticipatory framework he has devised; his personal construct system defines the only liberties he is ever able to claim. (Kelly, 1980, p. 32)

Due to the organizational closure of the individual system and its structural-determinism, Kelly (1955) asserts that interaction with the environment is always self-referential. The system informs and unfolds upon itself in a circular pattern of interaction (Foley, 1987). Essentially, the construction system construes its own definition and extension. Any change that the system may undergo is necessarily dictated by the relations between the elements that define its organization. In Kelly’s words, individuals are able to learn only what their systems are set up to learn:

One does not learn certain things merely from the nature of the stimuli which play upon him; he learns only what his framework is
designed to permit him to see in the stimuli.
(p. 79)

Identity
In order to process reality effectively, individuals require an identity, that is, a sense of self. Kelly (1955) views the self as a construct in and of itself:

...the self is, when considered in the appropriate context, a proper concept or construct. It refers to a group of events which are alike in a certain way and, in that same way, necessarily different from other events. The way in which the events are alike is the self. That also makes the self an individual differentiated from other individuals. (p. 131)

It may be argued that to have a self construct is to be conscious of the self as the subject of experience (McWilliams, 1987). This involves a kind of self-transcendence enabling individuals to engage in self-evaluation. Such awareness of self is necessary for the individual in order to deal effectively with an ever-changing world. In the course of passing through different phases of life, the experience of self as a fixed, permanent entity provides the individual with a
consistent position from which to view life events. Without identification of a self construct, individuals would be unable to transcend immediate needs in order to make choices and to anticipate events in the future.

Kelly (1955) implies that to effectively construe self, the individual must draw a distinction between self and other. Adams-Webber (1979) contends that only as individuals discern a specific pattern of similarities and differences between themselves and others do they acquire a distinct notion of their own identities. The perceived contrasts between self and other serve to define the contours of the self.

As one construes other people, he formulates the construction system which governs his own behavior. (Kelly, 1955, p. 133)

Bannister and Agnew (1977) interpret this as "the ways in which we elaborate the construing of self must be essentially those ways in which we elaborate our construing of others for we have not a concept of self but a bipolar concept of self-not self or self-others" (p. 99). In this way, the self may be seen as emerging through a process of continuous engagement with the environment. Stringer and Bannister (1979) have indicated that "for Kelly, the person...was only constituted in relations with others; constructs were
chiefly available through interaction with others and obtained their meaning in the context of that interaction" (p. xiv).

According to Kelly (1955), individuals achieve their identities as they create a system of core constructs. Governing the processes of self-maintenance, it is the integrity of the core construct system through its various transformations which gives the individual a sense of subjective continuity. Such integrity supports the predictive efficiency of the construct system. Coherence is maintained over years of growth and development in that core constructs are conserved (Kenny, 1988). Given the centrality of these core constructs to individuals' view of themselves, it is not surprising that individuals hold a great investment in their conservation (Button, 1985). It can be observed that individuals will place enormous restrictions upon themselves for the sake of preserving consistency.

Construction of the Personal Construct System

Having identified Kelly's (1955) view of the individual as a self-organizing system, it is now important to examine more closely his ideas regarding the actual construction of this system. Kelly's basic assumptions are presented in the Fundamental Postulate
and elaborated upon in a series of eleven corollaries (see Appendix A). Together these provide a theoretical context for achieving a clear understanding of the internal processes influencing the individual’s interaction with the social environment.

**Formation of the System**

The central tenets of personal construct theory are embedded in Kelly’s statement of the Fundamental Postulate:

> A person’s processes are psychologically channelized by the way in which he anticipates events. (p.46)

Reflective of the constructivist notion that reality can never be directly known, but remains only a construction of the individual experiencing it, the Fundamental Postulate directs attention to the ways in which individuals function to make their worlds more and more manageable. Kelly suggests that such behavior can best be understood as the consequence of individuals’ attempts to adequately predict the future on the basis of their previous experience. As such, the ability of individuals to maintain a coherent sense of self is seen as flowing from their capacity to formulate anticipations which accommodate to recurring and novel events in the environment (Mancuso & Adams-
Webber, 1982).

As already noted, Kelly’s (1955) theory focuses upon individuals and the particular systems of meaning such individuals construct throughout their lives. His Individuality Corollary states that "persons differ from each other in the construction of events" (p. 55). It may be inferred that individuals’ constructions of a situation define the situation. Accordingly, Kelly argues that the characteristics of the situation are not relevant in themselves but only with respect to their meaning to the individual:

He erects a structure, within the framework of which substance takes shape or assumes meaning. The substance which he construes does not produce the structure; the person does. (p. 50)

It would seem to follow that persons differing in their construction of events would necessarily differ also in their anticipation of events and their behavior resulting from these anticipations. Gara (1982) contends that it is "the individual’s own organization of experience [that] is the most fertile starting point for the process of understanding his or her conduct" (p. 45).

The nature of the construal process itself sheds
light upon the diversity of human experience. Essentially, the act of construing involves placing interpretations upon events. It is a process of abstraction in which individuals draw distinctions in their observation of a series of occurrences. In drawing distinctions, individuals note features of regularity distinguishing one pattern from another. The similarities and differences construed serve to punctuate their experience of the world and to provide order to an otherwise disorderly experience of life. It is this ability of people to infer some sort of pattern and order in their experience that enables them to succeed in making predictions (Button, 1985).

It can be seen that as events are differentiated, they become endowed with meaning, and it becomes feasible for the individual to predict them in the future. Kelly (1955) states in the Construction Corollary that "a person anticipates events by construing their replications" (p. 50). Nystedt and Magnusson (1982) interpret Kelly to mean that as an individual's immediate experience is construed as both similar to and different from previous constructions, the construed replication provides the basis for the individual's predictions of what will happen in the future:
one necessary condition for the "truth" of the Construction Corollary is that past experience leaves some effects. The person does not start construing without some earlier knowledge, but uses some preexisting schema that enables him to attend to or to notice certain aspects of the environment rather than others. (p. 39)

In this sense, past constructions anticipate current constructions which, in turn, anticipate future reconstructions.

As a means of minimizing incompatibilities and maximizing the individual's effectiveness in predicting events, Kelly (1955) theorized that individuals' constructions are organized into a construction system. As suggested by his Organization Corollary, "each person characteristically evolves, for his convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs" (p. 56). Mancuso and Adams-Webber (1982) contend that the regularities individuals encounter in their experience of the world provides evidence that they systematically impose a formal structure on all their involvements. Kelly views this structure as assuming a hierarchical arrangement, one in which some constructs subsume
others, which, in turn, subsume still others. Constructs at the bottom of the hierarchy address highly specific and concrete choices, and are more open to change. Constructs at the top of the hierarchy encompass a wider range of choices, holding implications for the system as a whole, and therefore, are resistant to change. It is these more meaningful constructs which govern the identity of the individual. The relationship between subordinate and superordinate constructs is dialectical; superordinate constructs guide and govern subordinates; subordinates support and validate superordinates.

Kelly (1955) further holds that individuals can vary in terms of how their constructs are arranged, some arrangements being more complex, flexible, and all-embracing than others (Button, 1985). Whether concretely pyramided or abstractly cross-referenced, it is the particular organization of the construct system which serves to channel the thoughts of individuals. Adams-Webber (1970) argues that the relations amongst constructs define the only avenues of movement individuals are able to make in resolving the contradictions they inevitably encounter. In order to make sense of a particular event, individuals must follow the networks of channels they have laid down for
In the construction of the construct system, it is the construct which is the primary unit of analysis. According to Kelly's (1955) Dichotomy Corollary, "a person's construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs (p. 59). A construct may be defined as an abstraction which is bipolar in nature; for example, up-down, hot-cold, happy-sad. Such definition highlights the assumption that meaning is inherently a matter of contrast; that up makes sense only in relation to down, hot in relation to cold, happy in relation to sad. However, it is important to understand a construct as the decision between a pair of rival hypotheses. Kelly makes clear that in applying a construct to an event, a choice is being made about the meaning to be attributed to this event when compared with another; for example, to describe someone as happy implicitly identifies another as sad. Essentially, the person's choice of how to interpret the situation determines the distinctions drawn. In this way, a construct can be viewed as representing the individual's personal orientation toward events encountered in the world. Kelly's idea of a construct has been compared with that of a cognitive schema, an organized framework of knowledge about a specific
domain that influences the selection, modification, and recall of available information (Hayden, 1982). This comparison serves to emphasize the nature of the construct to guide the extraction, organization, and interpretation of information.

Kelly (1955) contends that each construct has a limited range of convenience, thereby restricting the number of events to which it can be applied. His Range Corollary states that "a construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only" (p. 68). Mancuso and Eimer (1982) view this principle as referring to the successful categorization of events. They argue that coding an event by use of a construct whose range does not adequately extend to that event would not allow the use of an already established adjustment to that event. The resulting inappropriate assumptions would fail to produce an effective anticipation. Correspondingly, individuals are able to make more consistent and discriminating categorizations when they use constructs that they regard as relevant to events under consideration (Adams-Webber, 1979). Thus, it appears that the effective operation of a construct requires that the individual establish the boundaries within which the construct holds relevancy (Agnew & Brown, 1989).
The development of the individual's construct system rests upon a process of choice. In the Choice Corollary, Kelly (1955) suggests that "a person chooses for himself that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of his system" (p. 64). Extension refers to making the system more comprehensive in order to address experiences which previously lay outside its range of convenience; definition refers to making the current system more explicit and clear cut. In other words, individuals choose between playing it safe or risking adventure. Kelly upholds that whenever individuals are confronted with the opportunity for making a choice, they will tend to choose in favor of the alternative which provides the greater possibility for elaboration of their system. In placing relative values upon one or the other of the alternatives represented in each dichotomous construct, individuals will select that pole which is functionally integral with respect to the system. In other words, individuals will choose in the direction of reducing uncertainty and preserving coherence of the system. Kelly refers to such choice as "acting in defense of self" or "directed toward preservation of one's integrity" (p. 67). In the same
way, Mancuso and Eimer (1982) contend that "the likelihood of invoking any given construct is regarded as dependent on the implications it is judged to have relative to extracting validation for the rest of a person's system" (p. 145).

Stability and Change Within the System

In the normal course of development of the construction system, Kelly (1955) holds that individuals are directed toward making more and more of their world predictable. This process of giving order to an otherwise meaningless stream of events can be found to embrace a cycle of five phases: anticipation, investment, encounter, confirmation or disconfirmation, and constructive revision. Kelly refers to this as the experiential cycle. He contends that the particular nature of individuals' experiential cycles is determined by the process of validation.

As individuals encounter a new event, working hypotheses are put to the test of experience; if the event as anticipated takes place, individuals' anticipations are validated; if it fails to do so, their anticipations are invalidated. Essentially, "validation represents the compatibility (subjectively construed) between one's prediction and the outcome he observes" (Kelly, 1955, p. 158). While the principle
of elaborative choice directs the individual's anticipations, validation serves to verify the adequacy of these anticipations. In this way, validation regulates the completion of the experiential cycle. According to Kelly’s Experience Corollary, "a person’s construction system varies as he successively construes the replication of events" (p. 72). Adams-Webber (1970) contends that it is validation which plays a critical role in constructive revision, the final phase of the experiential cycle:

As events subject a person’s anticipations to a validational process, confirming some of them and disconfirming others, his constructs undergo progressive changes as a function of the fact that he successively revises them in the light of this feedback (p. 31).

In view of the constructive revision phase of the experiential cycle, it can be found that it is the novelty of those events which do not fit into the current structure of the individual’s construct system that stimulates change in its organization (Adams-Webber, 1970). Individuals need to adapt their construct systems in order to respond to natural changes in themselves and the outside world. Mancuso & Adams-Webber (1982) contend that changes evolve within
the system in order to adequately accommodate to events that lie outside its range of convenience:

A person's processes - his conduct - are directed toward those events which are incongruent with the internalized structures against which information has been monitored. Resolution of discrepancy occupies the major part of a person's life activity. (p. 24)

Kelly (1955) addresses the issue of change in his formulation of the Modulation and Fragmentation Corollaries. These principles stipulate the conditions under which change may occur while integrity of the entire system is maintained. The degree to which variation is accepted by the construction system has to do with the permeability of constructs at increasing levels of superordinancy. Kelly's Modulation Corollary asserts that "the variation in a person's construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose range of convenience the variants lie" (p. 77). Kelly (1970) defines permeability not as the "amenability [of a construct] to change within itself but its capacity to be used as a referent for novel events and to accept new subordinate constructs within its range of convenience" (p. 19). In other words, a construct is permeable if it is so constituted that new
experiences can be discriminately added to those it already embraces. The more inferences to be drawn from a single construct, the greater its flexibility in subsuming a variety of events. Landfield (1982), in interpreting Kelly, states that "how one copes with inconsistency and change must often be sought in those more open themes, abstractions, and superordinate aspects of the personal construct system. It is these more permeable structures that hold persons together and facilitate the encompassing of shifting contexts, behavioral change, conflicting experiences, and anticipations of the unknown" (p. 213).

In order to effectively assimilate change, Kelly (1955) further suggests that differentiation of the construct system into relatively independent subsystems can support the individual’s tolerance of incompatibility. His Fragmentation Corollary asserts that "a person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other" (p. 83). Adams-Webber (1970) interprets this principle to mean "that the differentiation of a construct system into relatively independent operational subsystems, by permitting the discriminative allocation of elements among relatively specialized sets of constructs, and thus, parallel
processing of information input, increases the deployability of the system as a whole" (p. 35). Adams-Webber goes on to point out that such fragmentation is only possible when there is no threat of damage to the functional integrity of the system as a whole. In other words, subsystems which may operate independently at lower levels of the construct system must be reintegrated at higher levels. The superordinate system coordinates the functioning of separate subsystems, thereby providing a thread of consistency throughout the construct system as a whole.

If individuals are bound by the structural characteristics of their construct system, then it follows that certain individuals will experience greater difficulty than others when confronted with the possibility of change (Landfield, 1982). Adams-Webber (1970) contends that structural extremes, whether too sparse or too extensive a pattern of relations among constructs, affect the individual’s encompassing of change. The more unidimensional the structure of a given system, the fewer the alternatives which are available to the individual in interpreting events. The logical constraints imposed by the individual’s reliance upon a single set of construct relationships is likely to arouse anxiety when the complexity of a
new event cannot be fitted into this simplistic framework. Such persons are reluctant to risk adjustments at any level for fear this will place them in an even more ambiguous position with respect to future anticipations. For this reason, such persons may choose to stay with the misery of a familiar event, rather than risk the uncertainty of living without it. Likewise, the opposite extreme presents similar liabilities. When the degree of integration is so limited that there is insufficient overlap among the ranges of convenience of the constructs, individuals are unable to relate one aspect of a set of events to another. As such, their sensitivity to extract and develop correlations between features in the environment is poor. They are able to draw few inferences from one event which can be used to inform them about another event.

According to Kelly (1955), the concept of anxiety plays a central role in the individual’s adjustment to the world of events. Essentially, anxiety signals the degree to which an event exceeds the structuring capacity of the construct system, thereby alerting the individual as to the need to make alternative constructions. The extent of anxiety is a function of the amount of discrepancy between the information
presented and the schema available from the existing system.

From the standpoint of the psychology of personal constructs, anxiety, per se, is not classified as either good or bad. It represents the awareness that one’s construction system does not apply to events at hand. It is, therefore, a precondition for making revisions. (Kelly, 1955, p. 498)

As previously discussed, individuals will generally adjust the form and content of their construing in an attempt to reduce the anxiety aroused by discrepancies in their experience. However, this transition is dependent upon the permeability of the superordinate system in allowing for the new construct. Impermeability can fail to support individuals in choosing an alternative construction, thus hindering their ability to adequately predict the situation in which they find themselves.

Most of us can tolerate some amount of incompatibility....The amount that can be tolerated depends on the permeability of superordinating constructs. If those constructs which would ordinarily superordinate the variants are insufficiently
permeable to admit impending variants into their ranges of convenience, the person finds himself in an anxiety situation. His construction system fails him....He is confronted with a changing scene, but no longer has a guide to carry him through the transition (Kelly, 1955, p. 496).

In the face of trying alternative constructions and experiencing repeated invalidation, individuals may respond to this transition in a number of ways. They can react by "loosening" their construct system in order to incorporate the new evidence (Fransella, 1970). While loosening of relationships between constructs allows for varying predictions to be made, Adams-Webber (1981) points out that such loosening can cause the meaning of constructs to become less well defined. The loss of definition can impose threat to the logical structure of the overall system.

Kelly (1955) maintains that individuals can experience threat when the degree of prospective change is substantial. Essentially, he describes threat as "the awareness of imminent comprehensive change in one's core structures" (p. 489). Fransella (1970) holds that the experience of threat interferes with individuals' formation of new constructs. People can
be found to fall back on older constructions or "tighten" their present construing in an effort to more clearly define what it is they are predicting.

Another reaction is hostility. When individuals hold too much investment in a particular anticipation, they can become hostile and attempt to alter the events so that they conform to their predictions. In this way, hostility reflects "the continued effort to extort validational evidence in favour of a type of social prediction which has already proved itself a failure" (Kelly, 1955, p. 510).

The implications of repeated invalidation upon individual functioning serve to emphasize the critical balance between stability and change to be maintained within the construction system. It seems clear that elaboration of the construction system requires sufficient stability of the overall system so that individuals are not unduly threatened by the prospect of change (Alexander & Neimeyer, 1989). While Kelly (1955) upholds the hope and potential of change, he also emphasizes the importance of continuity. He maintains that "construing is a way of seeing events that makes them look regular...[and] to be effective, the construction system itself must have some regularity" (p. 76).
Having contended that individuals are distinct by virtue of their unique systems of constructs, Kelly (1955) goes on to argue that they are similar to one another to the extent that there is commonality between their construct systems. According to his Commonality Corollary, "to the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to those of the other person" (p. 90). This principle emphasizes that it is similarity in the construction of an event, not the event itself, that provides for similar behavior between individuals.

Kelly states that construing of the construction processes of others is a necessary prerequisite to entering into social interaction with them. As stated in his Sociality Corollary, "to the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person" (p. 95). It may be inferred that the ability of individuals to effectively communicate with each other is limited by their understanding of one another's construct system. Landfield (1979) suggests that such understanding encompasses more than the observation of a particular choice, decision, or
pattern of behavior; it also includes the structure of feelings, attitudes, and values which are linked to these choices, decisions, and behaviors.

A more complete understanding of this principle lies in Kelly's (1955) definition of role. Rather than viewing a role as a socially prescribed set of expectations, Kelly perceives it as "a course of activity which is played out in the light of one's construction of one or more other persons' construct systems" (p. 177). This, of course, is a restricted definition of the term, one specifically relevant to the theory of personal constructs. From this perspective, a role is enacted on the basis of the individual's construing of another's outlook or way of seeing things. Essentially, the individual "behaves according to what he believes another person thinks, not merely according to what the other person appears to approve or disapprove" (Kelly, 1955, p. 178). Given the individual's investment in securing validation of these constructions, as a means of completing the experiential cycle, it can be found that individuals involve themselves in such a way that their behavior tends to become coordinated with that of the other.

It is generally agreed that the Commonality and Sociality Corollaries are inextricably linked and
together provide the basis upon which to establish a model of interpersonal relationships (Adams-Webber, 1979; Duck, 1982; Landfield, 1979). In correspondence with each other, these principles suggest that the extent to which commonality exists between two construct systems, the common parts of the systems facilitate social interaction. It can be inferred that increases in the degree of commonality should coincide with increases in the degree of understanding, and correspondingly, the basis for engagement in social processes (Duck, 1982).

Given that each and every change within the experience cycle presents the individual with a new problem of validity, the relationship between individuals and their social environment becomes especially important. The importance of commonality as a precondition for sociality can be seen as stemming from individuals' need to confirm that all or part of their construct system is useful. In support of this hypothesis, Duck (1979) has found individuals to be attracted to others who construe the social world using constructs that are similar to their own. Such construct similarity is reflective of similarity in content. As noted by Adams-Webber (1981), Duck proposes that the preference for construct similarity
is based upon the opportunity it provides for individuals to have their own constructs validated:

Duck suggests that it is "consensually validating" to find that our own personal constructions are shared by others, since this provides a source of "subjective" evidence that our own construing is relevant and accurate. (p. 61)

Duck (1979) further suggests that this notion of consensual validation serves a critical self-maintenance function for the individual:

Without opportunities to test out the validity of different levels of constructs, a person's system would lack its essential validational support and [the person's] psychological integrity would be shaken or sapped. (p. 285)

If commonality is an important precondition to sociality, then it follows that commonality may also influence choice of persons with whom social interaction of increasing significance occurs. In developing a model of friendship formation, Duck (1979) argues that the nature of commonality shifts as the relationship between friends develops. Proposing that there may be two different stages in the progression of
a relationship, he contends that commonality in terms of non-psychological constructs (i.e., appearance, social role, behavior) may facilitate interaction in the earlier stages of friendship, but commonality in terms of psychological constructs (i.e., personality traits, values) should become increasingly important as the relationship continues to develop. In this way, Duck upholds the importance of construct similarity throughout relationship formation to infer consensual validation at progressively deeper, more psychological levels of the construct system. Duck suggests that insufficient similarity between individuals at any stage of the relationship can cause them to filter one another from the pool of prospective friends:

Relations with specific others are attractive in so far as they (directly) produce or (indirectly) suggest support for the construct system; they develop in intimacy in so far as the partners expect to find more subtle parts of their construct systems validated as the relationship continues; these expectancies are either confirmed or not; where confirmation is strong the relationship will be likewise, and where it is weak or not present at all, the
relationship will fail to grow or will actually decline. (p. 295)

Neimeyer and Neimeyer (1981) extend Duck’s line of reasoning regarding the influence of similarity upon relationship development. They argue that individuals are attracted to others who possess not only similarity in constructs but similarity in the way constructs are applied to events.

It is not the similarity of experience which provides the basis for similarity of action, but similarity of their present construction of that experience. (Kelly, 1955, p. 92)

Addressing the way in which individuals function in their categorization of social experience, Neimeyer and Neimeyer refer to this as functional similarity.

Neimeyer and Neimeyer (1983) have presented structural similarity as a further aspect influencing the relationship process. This variable refers specifically to similarity in the interrelationships amongst construct dimensions that comprise the construct system, that is, similarity in cognitive complexity. While Duck (1972) interprets such similarity as indicative of the "normative effect of group membership" (p. 233), Neimeyer and Neimeyer argue for a different explanation. Drawing support from
findings that friends display greater similarity in system differentiation, Neimeyer and Neimeyer propose that the development of deeper role relationships is affected by the degree of structural similarity shared between individuals. They suggest that cognitive complexity is one feature in the structure of a person's psychological processes which imposes certain restrictive features upon interpersonal understanding. Contrary to Duck, they contend that affiliation is a consequence of structural similarity, not the reverse, and that such findings lend further support to the notion of consensual validation. Similarly, Adams-Webber (1970) considers cognitive complexity to be a significant factor in the accuracy of individuals' inferences about the construct systems of others. He contends that social interaction is dependent upon individuals holding elaborate sets of related constructs in mind, comparing them, and locating common points of reference. Individuals who hold greater cognitive complexity are able to employ a greater variety of constructs in a social interaction, thereby enhancing their understanding of the perspectives of the others involved. However, while cognitive complexity has generally been found to correlate with adaptation (Crockett, 1982), the reconciliation of
inconsistency in impressions of others appears to be mediated by a number of factors. Meltzer, Crockett, and Rosenkrantz (1966) found the expected effects of complexity upon resolution of inconsistency only when subjects agreed with the central values of the other person; when there was disagreement with the other person’s values, complex subjects were no different than noncomplex subjects at reconciling the inconsistency. In addressing these varied observations as to the nature of cognitive complexity, it can be argued that while there may be some intervening factors to consider, structural similarity remains an important factor in individuals’ communication and development of a relationship with another.

Given the relationship between commonality and sociality, it seems logical to assume that social involvement with friends would entail greater similarity amongst constructions than casual contact with a neighbour or the corner grocer. Support for such thinking has repeatedly been found (Duck, 1973; Duck & Spencer, 1972). Such evidence underscores the effect of similarity of construal upon relationship development.

Summary

Having reviewed the operation of the PCS, it can
be argued that validation holds a significant influence upon individuals' elaboration of their construct systems. Essentially, validation within the context of dyadic relationships is seen to support the individual's maintenance of a coherent sense of self. Kelly's view of the individual as dependent upon others for verification of the relevancy of their personal constructions is of considerable importance in the development of the proposed framework. It remains the scope of this paper to determine the extent to which validation bears significance in the individual's interaction with family as well as with the work organization.
Chapter III. The Development of Shared Construct Systems

Having reviewed in Chapter 2 the general principles of personal construct theory and its application to individual functioning, Chapter 3 now focuses upon the extension of Kelly’s (1955) theory to the area of shared construct systems. This examination addresses two areas of relevance: the family, and the work organization. The chapter begins with a review of family construct theory and the operation of the family construct system. The principles governing the functioning of family members as a group are then applied to the functioning of individuals within the work setting. The notion of an organizational construct system is proposed and its functioning within the work organization outlined.

The Family Construct System

In proposing the self-organizing system as the unit of examination, personal construct theory provides a theoretical base for understanding evolving systems of constructions not only at a personal level but at a family level as well. The move from individual to shared construct systems, however, does require a fundamental shift in theoretical standpoint. Individual perception must necessarily be reformulated
to encompass the interconnected cognitive schemas of the family unit. It is the integration of systems theory with personal construct theory which supports this shift being made. Together these contribute to a fuller understanding of the interplay between personal and interpersonal factors in the development of the shared construct system.

When regarded as single unit, the family is found to adhere to the principles of the self-organizing system. The overall configuration of the positions of family members relating together can be seen as assuming a life and identity of its own. The way in which family members are likely to frame their experience is a function of this shared view of reality. As such, an adequate understanding of family functioning requires examination of the family from the perspective of family members themselves. As Kantor (1985) so succinctly states, the shared family reality guides the variety of interactions family members can address while preserving their identity as a whole:

The ultimate task that all families, without exception, face: the responsibility for evolving a model (Kantor & Lehr, 1975) or paradigm for guiding their members through the ordinary and extraordinary exigencies of
life, a model for construing and dealing with realities within the family and between the family and its external environment. (pp. 21-22)

While Kelly (1955) has little direct to say about the family and its construction of reality, his ideas regarding group processes have much to contribute to an understanding of the dynamics involved in creating a shared reality (Alexander & Neimeyer, 1989).

Especially important is his discussion of commonality within cultures where he emphasizes that "it is not the similarity of experience which provides the basis for similarity of action, but similarity of their present construction of that experience" (Kelly, 1955, p. 92). It may be inferred that the effective functioning of a group is directed by the common channels of expectation which arise from group members construing events in a similar way. The experience of commonality increases the degree of interpersonal understanding, which, in turn, encourages social interaction.

In applying these notions to that of the family, it would appear that the effective functioning of the family is governed by their mutual anticipation of events. It is this line of thinking which Proctor (1981) assumes in his development of family construct theory. Perceiving the family to be directed toward
making its world more and more manageable, Proctor views family members as negotiating a common construction of reality in order to achieve this end. He incorporates the principles of personal construct theory with a wider systemic view to extend Kelly’s notion of the personal construct system to that of a jointly-held system of family constructs. Proctor refers to this interpersonal construction as the family construct system (FCS). Similar to the personal construct system in its structure and organization, the FCS comprises the set of constructs which guide family members in their activities.

The concept of the FCS covers the same theoretical ground as a number of other concepts proposed. Similar to the family paradigm (Reiss, 1981), as well as the family myth (Ferriera, 1965), the notion of a shared family reality serves to express the delicate coordination required of family members to enhance their functioning as a group. Reiss, for example, employs the concept of paradigm to define the underlying shared experiences of family life which play a significant role in shaping a family’s beliefs about itself and its transactions with the social environment. Similarly, Ferriera proposes the concept of family myth to identify the covert rules governing
the behavior of family members. These rules are viewed as "embodied in the beliefs and mutual expectations that the family members entertain about themselves" (Ferriera, 1965, p. 16).

Drawing upon Kelly's (1955) principles of commonality and sociality, Proctor (1981) develops two additional corollaries to address the nature of relationships within the family. In his design of a Group Corollary, Proctor extends Kelly's theory to encompass the area of multiperson relationships:

To the extent that a person can construe the relationships between members of a group, he may take part in a group process with them. (p. 354)

In his elaboration of a Family Corollary, Proctor addresses the specific condition upon which a group of people may live together over an extended period of time:

For a group of people to remain together over an extended period of time, each must make a choice, within the limitations of his system, to maintain a common construction of the relationships in the group. (p. 354)

Together these two corollaries suggest that a common construction of reality is a necessary prerequisite to
the formation of the family and its adequate functioning as a unit. Essentially, it can be argued that similarity in the construal of events is essential to the family's identity and each member's sense of belonging (Alexander & Neimeyer, 1989). Kelly's views on cultural membership make clear that it is similarity in construction that supports membership in a group:

People belong to the same cultural group, not merely because they behave alike, nor because they expect the same things of others, but especially because they construe their experience in the same way. (p. 94)

Proctor (1981) goes on to argue that the FCS governs "the sequences of contingent choices that constitute the interaction patterns of the family members" (p. 355). The functional role of each member and the rules of relationship implied in this role are defined as each construes the expectancies of others. Each member's action in relation to the others, in meeting with the expectancies of the group, then contributes in circular fashion to the perpetuation of a shared construct.

Over the years family members become highly sensitive to each other's reactions and behave together as in a 'dance' of mutual
anticipation. Any change in the others’ habitually anticipated choices will be experienced as anxiety provoking and threatening. An attempt will therefore be made to change the person back into predictable modes of behavior. (Proctor, 1981, p. 355)

Proctor seems to suggest an interdependence of the personal construct systems of individual members within the family context. Personal meanings are coordinated with the shared understandings of the group, and any change in the relations between individual members is subject to the coherent functioning of the group as a whole.

The effect of the FCS upon family interaction once again corresponds with that suggested by Reiss (1981) and Ferriera (1965) with respect to their particular notions. Reiss argues that the family paradigm serves to govern interaction patterns within the family, synchronizing each member’s action and planning with others in the family, and shaping the family’s relationship with its social environment. Similarly, Ferriera presents the family myth as a homeostatic mechanism regulating intrafamily transactions. He argues that the family myths, shared and supported by
all family members, provide "ready made formulae with which to meet a variety of situations... and prescribe the individual and conjoint behavior of the family members" (p. 16).

As a means of illustration, consider the example of an "enmeshed" family. As the lack of within-family boundaries grants that any family member's choice has immediate implications for other family members, an enmeshed family is likely to be more concerned with definition of their shared construct system than with extension. Elaboration of the shared construct system would be directed toward validation of cohesive behavior. As the family's sense of identity rests upon an agreement amongst members to maintain closeness, relationships in the family are likely to be governed by constructs that emphasize consensus, loyalty, and early closure on conflict. The shared family construct of "closeness" would direct such interaction. In this way, ambiguity accompanying the introduction of independent behavior would be held back, and threat to the family's coherent functioning avoided.

An Organizational Model

It is herein proposed that the theoretical concepts used to define the way in which families operate can also provide a framework for understanding
the way in which work organizations operate. It is the principles underlying the maintenance of group functioning which enables comparison of families and work organizations to be made. Families and work organizations are both groups of two or more people who behave interdependently and share some concept of a common interest. Both have the responsibility of shaping a coherent identity for the collectivity they organize. Comparison of the family and work organization from the perspective of group functioning suggests that the work organization too takes on characteristics of a self-organizing system. As such, the work organization, like that of the family, can be found to construct a shared reality to define the variety of interactions that individual members can address while maintaining relations with the group. This is not to say that the work organization is analagous with that of the family. While a work organization may act "as if" it is a family, it is not. The metaphor remains only a metaphor. Thus, any comparison between the family and work organization must acknowledge the limitations of drawing such an analogy. Essentially, it is important to recognize that the nature of the relationship differs between the individual and the family, and the individual and the
work organization. Family membership lasts a lifetime whereas membership in work organizations is more voluntary and tenuous. While the relationship with family generally involves strong emotional ties, the relationship with the work organization rests upon reciprocal value and instrumentality. Likewise, goals within the work organization are generally well-understood and clear, whereas in the family, they tend to be more broad and subject to the phases of human developmental. With these limitations in mind, however, argument can still be made for the relevance of family theory in providing understanding of the processes inherent in human relationship systems, in particular, the interactional dynamics affecting group functioning. It is the application of these processes to the work setting which the following discussion addresses.

Coinciding with Proctor's (1981) development of family construct theory, the present paper interfaces personal construct theory with systemic theory and the principles of organizational behavior to develop what may be called organizational construct theory. It is argued here that the day to day affairs of business within a work organization require a common system of construing to direct the cooperative efforts of
organizational members. As such, the work organization is seen as adhering to a shared construction of reality which supports common channels of expectations amongst its members. This interpersonal construction defines the values, norms, and practices that act as primary points of reference for the way in which individuals make sense of their work environment, and in so doing, provides the basis upon which individual members are rallied toward identification with the organization.

Expanding upon the concept of the FCS, the notion of a similar interpersonal construction operating within the work organization is proposed. Established over a period of time during which considerable negotiation and interaction among members occurs, this common construction of reality serves to channel, mold, enhance, sustain or otherwise influence the effective functioning of organizational members. This shared organizational reality is identified as the organizational construct system (OCS). Essentially, the OCS creates a shared understanding amongst organizational members as to the character of their workplace in contrast to that of another.

The notion of the OCS derives support from contemporary views of organizational culture as a socially constructed view of reality developed by
organizational members. Ouchi and Wilkins (1985) contend that "critical...to the study of organizational culture is the idea of an organization as a social phenomenon that has its own features which distinguish it from an environment on the one hand and from the individual desires and predispositions of its members on the other" (p. 469). Supporting this socially constructed view of reality, Imershein (1977) draws upon the early work of Kuhn (1970), extending his ideas of paradigm to that of the organization to create the notion of an organizational paradigm. Brown (1978) uses this concept of paradigm to define the organization in the following way:

...may lie in the concept of the organization as a paradigm. By paradigm we refer to those sets of assumptions, usually implicit, about what sort of things make up the world, how they act, how they hang together, and how they may be known. In actual practice, such paradigms function as a means of imposing control as well as a resource that dissidents may use in organizing their awareness and action....In a similar fashion, organizational paradigms provide roles to be enacted in particular ways, in particular
settings, and in particular relation to other roles. (p. 373)

Pfeffer (1981) argues that a critical management activity is the creation and maintenance of such organizational paradigms. Pfeffer asserts that within the organization these consensually shared perceptions and definitions of the world "provide organizational members with a sense of belonging and identity as well as demarcating the organization from its environments and assisting in the control and commitment of those within the organization" (p. 13). Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, and Sanders (1990), in a extensive study of organizational cultures, found these "shared perceptions of daily practices to be the core of an organization’s culture" (p. 311).

It is proposed that the OCS, like that of the FCS, is similar in construction to that of the PCS. Consisting of a hierarchically organized set of constructs, the OCS is viewed as prescribing the activities of the shared system. Principles governing the functioning of the OCS are derived from restating Kelly’s (1955) fundamental postulate and corollaries in organizational terms that appear as a derivative of the original formulation. For example, the fundamental postulate of organizational construct theory is stated
Organizational processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which the organization anticipates events. This principle implies that the functioning of the work organization, like that of the individual, proceeds according to the way in which future events are predicted. Each of the corollaries which follow upon this basic assumption further amplify the functioning of the OCS with respect to the organizational setting. While the work organization is being referred to here in global terms, it is important to recognize that work organizations have subunits which may be distinguished on the basis of their own shared meanings. It is maintained that the arguments made for the work organization as a whole can also be made, though to a lesser degree, with respect to subunits within the organization.

The complex nature of relationships in the workplace requires the addition of two other corollaries. First of all, the Group Corollary developed by Proctor (1981) to encompass multiperson relationships in the family is extended to relationships in the work setting. Secondly, a Work Organization Corollary is developed to address the
condition upon which organizational members are able to work cooperatively over time.

In order for a group of individuals to work together over time and remain committed to the agreed upon mission of the work organization, each must make a choice, within the limitations of their system, to maintain a common construction of the relationships in the workgroup.

Drawing upon Kelly's (1955) view of commonality as a precondition to sociality, the present paper argues that this similarity in construal is critical to the work organization's identity and a strong sense of belongingness amongst its members being maintained.

It is further suggested that the OCS governs the relations between members in the workplace. Essentially, in providing a shared understanding of the world for those within the work organization, the OCS binds organizational members to each other, fostering the development of a certain interdependence. Personal meanings become coordinated with those of the group. Common expectations arising from these shared meanings enable organizational members to predict one another's behavior and to adjust their own accordingly. In this way, organizational members function in some degree of
relationship reciprocity. Any change which poses threat to the coherent functioning of the workgroup is resisted.

This notion of the OCS as governing interaction patterns amongst organizational members is compatible with research on the effects of organizational culture. Buono, Bowditch, and Lewis (1985) view organizational culture as a powerful determinant of individual and group behavior:

Organizational culture affects practically all aspects of organizational life from the way in which people interact with each other, perform their work and dress, to the types of decisions made in a firm, its organizational policies and procedures, and strategy considerations. (p. 482)

Van Maanen and Kunda (1989), in describing culture as the moral order of a collective, argue that "such things as ritual, myth, stories, espoused values, special language, and prescribed norms index the way members are expected by others in the organization to feel" (p. 56). Pfeffer (1981), in discussing the impact of organizational paradigms upon the behavior of groups of individuals, contends that shared beliefs "cause action to be interpreted in a way compatible
with the emergent norms and values" (p. 1). Pfeffer goes on to argue for the resiliency of the organizational paradigm:

A challenge to the shared system of beliefs both challenges the actions taken within the social structure and threatens to introduce increased uncertainty and ambiguity into the situation. Given the certainty and social cohesion they facilitate, it is quite understandable why shared paradigms or systems of meaning and belief come to have great stability and resistance to change. (p. 21)

Consider the following illustration. Take a work organization whose structure is reflective of a "results-orientation". Directed toward gaining marketing advantage over an established competitor and thereby achieving greater regional control, company incentive programs promote individual initiative and pioneering behavior. As the organization’s identity rests upon the mutual agreement of its members to support "a bias for action," the OCS encourages patterns of relating that are direct, competitive, and intolerant of mistakes. Compare this with an organization that adopts a "process-orientation".
Relations amongst members of the workgroup encourage an informal style of dealing with each other, one that is typically warm, open, and affirming. While interaction patterns in the former case are governed by constructs that endorse competitiveness amongst organizational members, relationships amongst employees in the latter case emphasize cooperation. Essentially, the OCS governing each of these work organizations varies considerably in association with the particular identity being upheld.

**Summary**

It may well be argued that the work of Kelly (1955) has much to contribute to an understanding of family dynamics as well as organizational behavior. The notion of shared construct systems operating at both the family and work organization levels clearly emphasizes that group functioning is directed by the mutual anticipations of members. It has been suggested that such mutuality is a function of personal constructions becoming coordinated with those of the group. Individual membership within the family as within the work organization is dependent upon such coordination. It is the interactional dynamics influencing such coordination which assumes the focus of further inquiry.
Chapter IV: The Interaction Between Personal and Shared Construct Systems

Having identified in Chapter 3 the particular functioning of the shared construct system, it remains the scope of Chapter 4 to examine the interactional dynamics influencing the coordination of personal and shared construct systems. Concepts drawn from the individual's interaction with the family contribute to an understanding of the individual's interaction with the work organization. It is a process of consensual validation which is identified as regulating the coordination of individual family members' constructions with those of the family as a whole. It is subsequently proposed that this process of consensual validation is the mechanism through which individual linkages with the work organization are also formed.

Individual Interaction With the Family

Kelly (1955) maintains that individuals depend upon others, not only to secure validation for their particular construction of reality, but also to create and maintain a sense of self. This principle holds particular significance when applied to the role of the family in the socialization of the individual. Within the interactive context of the family, individuals are
seen to construct their way of being in the world. It can be argued that the family, in serving as a direct source of confirmation and disconfirmation for the individual's anticipations throughout childhood and adolescence, holds a profound influence upon the development of the individual's personal construct system. As noted by Reiss (1981), "the family has become the most important group for shaping personal explanatory systems" (p. 7).

Alexander and Neimeyer (1989) attest that in "providing the predominant validational backdrop against which the infant tests emerging constructions, the family furnishes the prepotent context for development of the self" (p. 112). During early stages of development, parents define for the child the relevant distinctions to be drawn amongst the world of events (Salmon, 1970). In doing so, they offer the child a construction in terms of which to respond toward similar events in the future. As the child matures, parents assist the child in perceiving the interrelations among various events, thereby "facilitating the likelihood of the child modulating his variations in construction so as to develop an increasingly more complex and hierarchically structured system" (Hayden, 1982, p. 182). Likewise, parents
serve as mediators of the environment. By regulating the actual fields of the child’s experience, they insulate the child from experiences which might otherwise challenge the current constructions of the family (Alexander & Neimeyer, 1989).

Early childhood experiences with caregivers not only provide the basis upon which relational styles and rules of interaction are developed, but these experiences also contribute to the individual’s elaboration of a self. Essentially, the family supplies children with the first dimensions for appraising their own behavior in relation to others. Social interactions within the family generate opportunities for the creation of cognitive conflicts necessary for the development of the self construct. Kelly (1955) asserts that when individuals begin to draw comparisons between themselves and others, they formulate the construction system which governs their own behavior:

It is of course the comparison he sees or construes which affects his behavior. Thus, much of his social life is controlled by the comparisons he has come to see between himself and others. (p. 131)

It can be argued that the individual embedded within
the family context comes to experience a certain view
of self in relation to other. This definition of
self/other becomes incorporated into the internal
structures of the individual, that is, the personal
construct system, and serves to guide the individual's
playing out of a role.

It can be inferred that constructs defining early
relational patterns may influence the way in which
subsequent relations are construed. Proctor (1981)
upholds that individuals "carry their family-negotiated
realities around with them and use them to construe
individuals and relationships between people with whom
they come into contact" (p. 357). Reiss (1971) argues
that "each dimension of shared family experience
corresponds to a dimension of individual perceptual
orientation in each member" (p.22). It is for this
reason that Salmon (1970) contends that the dimensions
in terms of which individuals define their behavior
toward others are not selected at random. He suggests
they are "derived from roles which [they have] played
with other individuals, the frame of reference which
[they have] elaborated in common with them, and the
agreed network of implications which [they have] shared
with others in crucial interpersonal relationships" (p.
216).
The nature of the individual’s relationship with the family provides for a rich understanding of the interaction between individual and shared construct systems. Having previously emphasized the interdependence of relationships amongst family members, it is now argued that the way in which personal positions are coordinated with those of the family as a whole is a critical factor in comprehending relationship development. The key word here is coordination. It can be understood as the manner in which individual perceptions are interlocked with the perceptions of others so as to enhance group organization. Kelly (1970) refers to such coordination when he speaks of the development of role relationships:

When one construes another person’s outlook, and proceeds to build an experiential cycle of his own upon that construction, he involves himself, willy nilly, in an interesting way. He can test his constructions only by activating in himself the version of the other person’s outlook it offers. This subtly places a demand upon him, one he cannot lightly reject if his own experience is to be completed. He must put
himself tentatively in the other person's shoes. Only by enacting that role can he sense the impact of what happens as a result of taking the point of view he thinks his friend must have. (p. 26)

It may be inferred that individual family members base their constructions of one another not only on overt behavior, but also on their understanding of the others' constructions (Alexander & Neimeyer, 1989). Individuals' elaboration of their own systems, whether by definition or extension, is dependent upon the incorporation of the construction processes of others. As Reiss (1981) has so succinctly put it, "each person must develop his personal explanatory systems in concert with others" (p. 6). The completion of the experience cycle necessarily commits the individual to the position of having his role constructions validated by the expectancies of the persons with whom he construes his role. Kelly (1955) alludes to the critical validational function of role relationships in his discussion of group expectancies as validators of personal constructs:

The expectancies which are common to the group actually operate as the validators against which the individual tends to verify
the predictive efficiency of his own constructs. (p. 176)

Extending this principle to the context of the family, it can be seen that individual family members' role constructions derive validation as they meet with the expectancies of other members. However, as individual family members secure validation for the relevance and accuracy of their own role-related constructions, their behavior, in turn, serves to validate the expectancies of the other family members. Essentially, the two positions maintain each other in a reciprocal fashion. The interdependence of their personal positions institutes a process of consensual validation which maintains the shared construct system. The common understandings that accompany these cycles of interlocked roles serve to provide certainty and predictability for individual family members.

Consider the example of a husband and wife in which the cycle of behavior characterizing their relationship conforms to the pattern of overfunctioner/underfunctioner (see Figure 4.1). The wife is found doing more than her share of responsibilities around the home in contrast to her husband's lack of involvement in helping out. It can be seen that the wife's overfunctioning behavior
Expectation validates wife’s role construction

Holds role construction as "Overfunctioner"

Expects wife can manage responsibilities on her own

Role enactment validates husband’s expectancy invoking his irresponsible behavior

**Figure 4.1.** The reciprocal nature of consensual validation

actually invokes her husband’s irresponsible behavior. In successfully managing the household chores on her own, the wife meets with her husband’s expectancies, and thereby, validates his underfunctioning behavior. Reciprocally, his response serves to validate her role construction as an overfunctioner. The interlocking of their personal role constructions through the process
of consensual validation serves to maintain the shared construction governing this pattern in their relationship.

The Role of Validation

In considering the relationship between personal and shared construct systems, it is proposed here that the principle of consensual validation serves a self-referent process, which in affirming the individual’s

<table>
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<th>Personal Construct Systems</th>
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Figure 4.2. The role of consensual validation in the interaction between personal and shared construct systems
constructions of reality, binds the individual to the group (see Figure 4.2). Previous discussion has already identified the nature of individual structure to guide the variety of interaction in which the individual is able to engage and still retain a coherent sense of self. This paper argues that consensual validation, in acting as an internal consistency criterion, is the mechanism by which such coherence is maintained. The notion of consensual validation as an internal consistency criterion is taken from Warren's (as quoted by Mancuso & Adams-Webber, 1982) interpretation of Kelly's (1955) theory:

He [Kelly] makes the business of validation of constructs also a matter of construing...[the] criterion for a person's assessment of the outcome of his anticipations is the internal consistency of the present constructions within the person's construct system....truth becomes a matter of coherence within a system rather than of correspondence with reality. (p. 31)

Kelly (1955) has suggested that individuals' development of relationships with others rests upon their need to secure validation for the efficiency of
their personal constructions. Given that individuals are directed toward elaboration of their construct systems, such validation must necessarily encompass both definition as well as extension of the construct system. This implies that in the context of relationship formation, individuals directed toward defining their system would be most concerned with coming to see if a particular construct is regarded as valid by other people. Correspondingly, individuals directed toward extension of their system would be most interested in discovering what other people knew that could be subsumed in the constructs they presently employ.

The present discussion draws upon Duck's view of relationship formation in dyadic relationships. Duck's (1982) notions as to the course of development of individuals' relationships with another are extended to the interaction between personal and shared construct systems. It is Duck's belief that relationship formation is characterized by people initially seeking out areas where their construct systems overlap, thereby offering definition, and then proceeding, if the relationship holds promise, to explore ways in which their construct systems may stimulate one another, thereby encouraging extension. The same is
herein proposed to be true of relationship development between personal and shared construct systems (see Figure 4.3). Essentially, this paper argues that consensual validation, in supporting the coherent functioning of the personal construct system, serves to moderate the individual's formation of a relationship with the shared construct system. Commonality between the personal and shared construct systems provides for 'subjective' evidence of the meaningfulness of individuals' constructions. Consensual validation is achieved through individuals sharing common constructs for interpreting experience (Duck, 1979), applying

Figure 4.3. The effect of consensual validation upon relations between personal and shared construct systems
those constructs in a similar way (Neimeyer & Neimeyer, 1981), and structuring their systems similarly (Neimeyer & Neimeyer, 1983). In reinforcing current structures, definition of the present system and assurance as to its functionality is provided. This paper further suggests that the psychological security experienced through such consensual validation then enables individuals to consider more easily the viability of new, alternative constructions. When confronted with unfamiliar events, individuals' relations with the shared construct system provide support for extension of their personal construct systems. In support of such thinking, Neimeyer and Neimeyer (1985) have suggested that individuals develop more satisfying relationships with others who they believe accurately understand the way they view themselves and their desired direction of change. Similarly, Duck (1979) has noted that "individuals will, over and above the search for similarity, be searching for ways in which their partner can help develop or elaborate their system for them" (p. 6). It follows that breakdown in the relationship between personal and shared construct systems may occur when individuals' emerging constructions of self do not meet with the relational validation vital to their
development (Neimeyer & Neimeyer, 1985). Thus, it is herein argued that in correspondence with the support provided by consensual validation, individuals are able to negotiate a successful relational course with the shared construct system, choosing whether to define or extend their construct system.

**Individual Interaction With the Work Organization**

As with socialization in the family, socialization in the work organization involves the individual coming to learn the practices that carry specific meaning within the work setting. It can be seen that within the work organization, like that of the family, those in supervisory positions hold a strong influence upon individual members' anticipations. By serving as a repeated source of confirmation and disconfirmation, managers shape the constructions of organizational members. Pfeffer (1981) maintains that "a critical management activity involves the construction...of belief systems which assure continued compliance, commitment, and positive affect on the part of participants" (p. 1). Essentially, management's development of mission statements, design of rituals, and practise of a variety of traditions serves to coordinate individual anticipations with those of the group.
Having drawn from the history of interactions with family, friends, and others, a system of constructions that enable meaning to be attributed to the world of events, this system can be found to influence the individual’s perceptions of the work organization as well as relative reactions to it. Essentially, individuals come to the work organization with a system of constructs upon which they rely to anticipate events in the work setting. Schein (1965) identifies that, amongst other factors, individuals look to the workgroup to provide a means of establishing and testing reality, and as well, a means of developing, enhancing, or confirming a sense of identity. He describes this socialization process in terms of a "psychological contract", that is, a process of negotiation and renegotiation in which the individual and work organization clarify their expectations of each other. It can be argued that the extent to which individuals are able to reconcile their construct system with that of the workgroup, or in other words, to subsume the constructions of the OCS, they are likely to form a relationship with the work organization.

Drawing upon the propositions previously presented, the central tenet of this thesis is that the
individual’s formation of a relationship with the work organization is a function of such relations providing for consensual validation. As individuals find that their personal constructions are shared by others in the work setting, this experience of commonality and its implied validation for the accuracy of their view of reality encourages relationship formation. The experience of commonality further corresponds with the discovery of mutual expectations, which guide individuals’ interpretations of what another will do and what this other person expects them to do. It follows that when individuals can accurately predict what another will do, they can adjust their own behavior accordingly. This serves to enhance their playing out of preferred roles. In this way, individuals are able to successfully negotiate their actions within the work setting. Thus, it is proposed that the individual’s relationship with the work organization will continue to develop as long as consensual validation of progressively more central aspects of the individual’s construct system is experienced. Disruption is believed to occur when individuals experience some major disconfirmation of valued parts of themselves or a role construction from which they derive self-esteem. Van Maanen and Kunda
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(1989) contend that "organizational members do, after all, have conflicting sources of attachment and, when it comes to deciding what rules are to govern action, thought, and feeling, organizational ones will not always suffice or win out" (p. 58). Van Maanen and Kunda go on to say that members may "self-select in and out of the organization, with those remaining finding it perhaps easier to identify more closely with the organization, and, in the end, coming to regard its rites, symbols, and codes of conduct as appropriate, if not natural" (p. 57).

This paper suggests that as individuals are exposed to new experiences in the workplace and find that they are faced with unfamiliar events by virtue of their involvement, one of two things can happen. Providing individuals have enough well-defined structure to avoid the confusion of anxiety, they may choose to extend their system by developing alternative constructions. Such reorganization of their construct system, however, is dependent upon the availability of permeable constructs which span both old and new behavior patterns. In the words of Kelly (1955), "any transition needs to be subsumed by some overriding construction which is permeable enough to admit the new construct to its context" (p. 82). With respect to
this limitation, Hayden (1982) reports that people's willingness to make changes in their construct systems to encompass a more desired view of self is a function of the number of implications of that view:

If the ideal view possessed greater meaning or more implications than did the present view of self, then the subject was willing to shift to the desired view of self. That is, the desired view of self was more permeable and thus could embrace the change...Very often, in fact, the person knows how he would like to perceive his actions and thoughts, but the relative paucity of meaning possessed by that vantage point prevents a variation in his interpretation. In other words, the desired view is not sufficiently permeable within the existing system...Consequently, the subject possessing constructs with relatively less permeability must limit his construction process and cannot shift to the desired, but less meaningful, view of self.

(p. 195)

Hayden goes on to say that in this sense, the nature of individuals' systems makes them something of a victim of their previously created order and meaning.
The research on the adult's construction of reality demonstrates that the system that provided him with a way to give order and meaning to reality can be changed...Yet any variation in construction is affected by past interpretations. Change in the construction of a future event occurs within the context of superimposed forms that gave meaning to his past experiences. (p. 195)

For such reason, change required to successfully negotiate an unfamiliar experience can jeopardize the integrity of individuals' slowly built-up view of reality. This idea is similar to that proposed by Boxer (1982) in his identification of the process of attachment imposing restraint upon choice. Boxer suggests that individuals come to develop ways of acting that work for them and even enable them to feel centred. Thus, while at one time individuals may have had the ability to freely choose, success has led them to become very attached to a certain way of acting, to the point where they have chosen to become effectively fixed.

Salmon (1970) addresses this notion in his identification of individuals' persistence in using constructions built from the organizing constructs in
early stages of development. He argues that individuals' reliance upon such constructs may inhibit their negotiation of personal change:

Having forged out of his experience, in the long journey through childhood and adolescence, a construing system which seems to cover most of the interpersonal situations he has met so far, he may then settle for this as the best model he can hope to achieve, and may as a result cease, in Kelly's terms, to "experiment with his life". The backing of others, with the consensual definition of maturity in relatively fixed terms, may endorse this lack of growth, until, as a result of some personal crisis, he is likely to "have to go through a lot of chaos before he can make anything more of himself." (p. 220)

In this sense, constructs defining self and other, and self in relation to other, as developed through the process of maturation, can become restrictive. This is particularly true of events that happen in childhood which are laden with an intense arousal reaction. These events, which are construed with child constructions, can subsequently interfere with the
individual's development of constructions that are more in keeping with the adult system (Morrison & Cometa, 1982).

Drawing upon these ideas, it is herein argued that when individuals are exposed to an unfamiliar event, but lack the structure to adequately attribute meaning to the event, they may become anxious and experience threat to the coherence of their system. The lack of consensual validation experienced for the relevancy of their personal constructions can lead to disruption of their relationship with the work environment.

For example, consider a company whose productivity relies upon the progressive and innovative behavior of organizational members. Such an organization may be guided by a construct system that upholds the

\[\text{Successful vs. Non-successful}\]
\[\text{Commitment to cooperative problem-solving}\]
\[\text{Administrative decision-making}\]
\[\text{Collaboration of individual contributions}\]
\[\text{Conformity}\]

\textbf{Figure 4.4.} Laddering of constructs in a work organization
superordinate construct "successful", as emerging from the subordinate constructs "commitment to cooperative problem-solving" and "richness of individual contributions" (see Figure 4.4).

For organizational members whose personal construct systems are constructed in a similar fashion, their participation in this company will provide validation for their particular way of being in the world. Not only will the experience of similarity enable their activity to be directed by common channels of expectation, but their corresponding role constructions will secure validation in meeting with the demands for organizational success. In this way, self-referent processes link the individual to the organization.

It can be argued that the experience will be very different for organizational members whose personal construct systems diverge from that upheld by the work organization. Consider the organizational member who holds the superordinate construct "successful" as corresponding with the subordinate constructs "deferment to administrative decision-making" and "conformity" (see Figure 4.5). To the extent that this superordinate construct holds significant implications for a wide array of the individual's experience, and in
**Figure 4.5.** Comparision of individual and work organization construct systems

so doing, serves as a core construct defining the individual's identity, adjustment to the workgroup may be limited. Identification with the perspectives of the work organization would involve developing a new meaning of what it meant to be successful. As roles played in relation to family and friends may be called into question, threat may be posed to the individual's more broad interpretation of life experience. Given the present example, for the individual to adjust his or her personal constructions to correspond with that of the work organization, the growing appreciation for cooperative decision-making may affect the experience of decision-making in the family. Within the family
context, these new views may emerge as a source of conflict, given the implications of new behavior now required on the part of other family members in their interaction together. Salmon (1970) contends that in many social groups there is an inclination toward pinning down the characteristic roles which individuals are expected to play. Attempts on the part of these individuals to break free from their role prescriptions may be met with accusations of acting inconsistently. As those who relate to them must necessarily develop new orientations towards these individuals, strong resistance to the change may be aroused as threat to the stability of their own construct systems is experienced. This resistance, if maintained, can prevent individuals from living out their new role constructions.

Summary

It can be seen that the arguments developed in this chapter serve to provide a theoretical framework for viewing the individual's development of a relationship with the work organization. Drawing upon the individual's relationship with the family, it is a process of consensual validation which is found to play a critical role in the coherent functioning of the PCS being maintained. It is this principle which sheds new
meaning upon the individual’s interaction with the workplace. Essentially, consensual validation is seen to serve a self-referent process, binding the individual to the work organization.
Chapter V: Implications For Organizational Commitment

In drawing upon the principles put forward in the previous chapters, Chapter 5 proposes a framework for viewing the individual’s formation of a committed relationship with the work organization. The view of the individual as a self-organizing system, whose linkages with the work organization are subject to support for the integral functioning of this system, serves to suggest consensual validation as the underlying factor influencing the individual’s development of organizational commitment. In other words, determining whether or not elaboration of the individual’s construct system meets with consensual validation within the workplace can yield important information as to the type of commitment the individual is most likely to develop.

Review of Organizational Commitment Literature

Numerous efforts have already been made to determine the antecedents and consequences of organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Steers (1977) found that influences could be grouped into three categories: personal characteristics, job or role-related characteristics, and work experience. More recently, a fourth category, namely, structural characteristics, has been suggested (Morris & Steers,
Outcomes of organizational commitment have been related to job performance, tenure, absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982).

In the face of economic restraint and an increasingly competitive market, work organizations have become hard pressed to find ways of maintaining their high standards of performance (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986). While they value commitment amongst their individual members, determining how to foster the kind of commitment that is encouraging of extra-role behavior has become a particular concern. Mowday et al. (1982) identify with this dependency of the work organization upon such behavior:

There are many instances where organizations need individual members, especially those in critical positions, to perform above and beyond the call of duty for the benefit of the organization. (p. 15)

It is for this reason that differentiation amongst types of organizational commitment has come to receive both theoretical and empirical attention. A meta-analysis of previous studies has suggested that two forms of commitment appear to be separable: calculative commitment and attitudinal commitment (Mathieu & Zajac,
Calculative commitment is seen as referring to instrumental involvement on the basis of side-bets or investments over time (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972). O’Reilly and Chatman (1986) view this type of commitment as compliance-based. By this they mean that work behavior is dependent upon the attainment of specific extrinsic rewards. Such material exchange, however, is not viewed as providing adequate motivation for extrarole behavior. It appears that something more than calculative commitment is required for individuals to perform innovative behaviors that go beyond the role prescription.

Attitudinal commitment, on the other hand, refers to involvement that is based upon the individual’s identification with the organization. Mowday et al. (1982) view such commitment as characterized by (a) a belief and acceptance of the organization’s values, (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in it. It is this dimension of commitment that appears to be predictive of extra-role behavior. Individuals whose attachment to the work organization is based upon this type of commitment are more likely to act instinctively for the benefit of the
A Consensual Validation Model of Organizational Commitment

The present paper proposes that the process of identification associated with attitudinal commitment is representative of individuals experiencing consensual validation of their role-related constructions in the work setting. Support for such thinking is derived from the writings of Kanter (1972). Kanter views identification with an organization to be a function of the degree to which the individual "sees it as expressing or fulfilling some fundamental part of himself...as supporting his concept of self" (p.66). Individuals try to maintain their constructions of self. If one has been encouraged in early relational patterns to construe self as "competitive", involvement in a work environment which enables enactment of this self-defining role will appear attractive. The individual's growing relationship with this work organization will be enhanced by the validational feedback achieved for the self construct. On the other hand, failure to achieve validation for this self-defining role may dispute the coherence of the individual's identity (Kelly, 1955), thereby creating intrapersonal conflict.
In addressing other factors influencing organizational commitment, Schein (1985) suggests that internal integration, as generated by value similarity, is particularly significant:

Individuals who hold the same values are thought to share certain aspects of cognitive processing. These similarities are presumed to foster comparable methods of classifying and interpreting environmental events, and a common system of communication. Such qualities are essential to the success of interpersonal activities...thereby enhancing...organizational commitment. (p. 424)

The present paper suggests that these shared aspects of cognitive processing can be understood in terms of the commonality between one person’s construct system and that of another. The consensual validation provided by construct similarity, functional similarity, and structural similarity gives rise to common channels of expectation, enabling behavior to be effectively coordinated.

Correspondingly, Meglino, Ravlin, and Adkins (1989) attribute role clarity to the ability of individuals to accurately predict each other’s behavior
on the basis of shared values. Fisher and Gitelson (1983) have found that individuals who experience less role ambiguity and conflict are more committed to their work organizations. Similarly, greater levels of role strain have been found to correspond with lower amounts of organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Once again, this paper interprets these variables in light of the ability of individuals to reconcile their own construct systems with those of others in the organization. Since organization of the construct system serves to minimize incompatibilities and inconsistencies, the introduction of ambiguity becomes a source of cognitive strain in that the coherent functioning of the system is disrupted. When a particular event does not fit the pattern of construct relationships as they exist within the current structure, it is necessary for the individual to develop new constructs in order to adequately accommodate to this event. However, structural liabilities within the construct system may restrict a necessary revision of constructs. Kelly (1955) contends that individuals whose constructs are relatively undifferentiated in structure, due to dependence upon a single pattern of construct relationships, will tend to resist change in the face
of ambiguity in order to avoid further confusion and anxiety. In not being able to make sense of those events which do not fit the current pattern of relationships between their constructs, individuals find themselves unable to adjust their thinking to the demands of a changing work environment. The failure of the construct system at this point to adequately embrace events as they take place within the work organization may be experienced as personally threatening.

One controls his system by maintaining a clear identification of the elements which the system excludes as well as those which it includes. The moment one finds himself becoming involved in any way with the excluded elements of his system, he becomes aware of the onset of incompatibility and sees these new clutching associations as threats. (Kelly, 1955, p. 167)

It is argued here that in such a case, individuals are likely to leave the organization in favour of another which is more fitting, or to reframe their involvement in calculative terms as opposed to attitudinal. Such a decision on the part of the individual serves to support the ongoing meaningfulness of the PCS.
Specifically, it is an experience of consensual validation as to the efficiency of the PCS, not one of threat as to its inadequacy, which encourages individual membership in the work organization.

Concluding Summary and Statement of Thesis

This paper has attempted to provide a framework for understanding the interactional dynamics influencing transactions between individuals and the work environment. The personal construct theory of Kelly (1955) has served as a theoretical base upon which principles governing interaction between personal and shared construct systems have been established. Concepts drawn from the nature of individual involvement in the family have contributed to the development of a framework for viewing individual involvement in the work organization. The limitations accompanying the extension of family principles to that of the work organization have been addressed. Within these limitations, however, it is suggested that the family and work organization can be found to share similarities in their functioning as a group. On the basis of the literature reviewed, it is a process of consensual validation which is identified as the critical factor influencing individual membership in a group. Given the nature of the individual to function
as a self-organizing system, it is this process of consensual validation which is seen to support the coherent functioning of the individual system and to guide interaction with the environment. Essentially, consensual validation is viewed as sustaining the individual's definition of self at progressively more central aspects of the PCS.

Drawing upon the arguments developed in the preceding chapters, this paper herein advances that organizational commitment can be explained on the basis of individual structure and the self-referent process of consensual validation. It is the thesis of this paper that individuals will develop an attitudinal type of commitment within the workplace to the extent that consensual validation is experienced for the PCS. As individual structure specifies the domain of interaction in which individuals are able to engage and still maintain a sense of coherence, the inclination of individuals to become committed is viewed as a function of the degree to which interaction with the OCS provides for definition and extension of their construct systems. A lack of consensual validation is seen as corresponding with the individual's experience of intrapersonal conflict and subsequent need to minimize threat to the PCS by discontinuing the
relationship or redefining the relationship in a less relevant way. On this basis, it is argued that individuals enculturated to the workings of a particular self construct will likely experience a greater sense of affiliation toward a work environment where this is maintained versus where it is not. The nature of individuals to be directed toward self-maintenance serves to support this. Further, it is believed that involvement over time will be enhanced to the extent that the work organization supports individual change in desired directions. In this way, the self-referent process of consensual validation is forwarded as the critical factor linking the individual to the work organization. Specifically, it is the experience of consensual validation which encourages the individual's development of a committed relationship to the work organization.
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Appendix A

The following is a summary of the fundamental postulate and its corollaries as pertaining to the personal construct theory of Kelly (1955, pp. 103-104).

**Fundamental Postulate**

A person’s processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events.

**Construction Corollary**

A person anticipates events by construing their replications.

**Individuality Corollary**

Persons differ from each other in their construction of events.

**Organization Corollary**

Each person characteristically evolves, for his convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs.

**Dichotomy Corollary**

A person’s construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs.

**Choice Corollary**

A person chooses for himself that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of his
system.

**Range Corollary**

A construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only.

**Experience Corollary**

A person’s construction system varies as he successively construes the replications of events.

**Modulation Corollary**

The variation in a person’s construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose range of convenience the variants lie.

**Fragmentation Corollary**

A person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other.

**Commonality Corollary**

To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to those of the other person.

**Sociality Corollary**

To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person.