Collaborative Writing, Document Cycling, and Gatekeeping in a Fortune 500 Company: A Case Study and its Implications for Business Communication Instructors

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s, an extensive corpus of research has persuasively demonstrated that document cycling—the drafting of a document by a single writer, with subsequent review by supervisors and other stakeholders—is the most common form of collaborative writing in workplace environments. However, these studies have not examined the processes by which document cycling actually achieves its intended purpose: the transformation of a document, originally composed by one author, into a text that represents a pronouncement of the corporation. In order to examine this process of transformation, a case study was conducted during a nine-month period commencing in January 2006. The study focused upon the work of two writers, employed in a Fortune 500 Company, who generate documents intended to define and communicate corporate policy to 23,000 employees worldwide. The research method selected for this study is that of participant-observer ethnography. The study concludes that document cycling successfully accomplishes its communicative purpose if (1) the process of cycling occurs within the context of an hierarchy of power relations, comprised of clearly demarcated sets of roles and responsibilities and (2) "gatekeepers" within the organization are assigned responsibility to grant corporate authority to documents that meet specific criteria. Thus, cycling is not merely a form of collaborative writing; rather, this process is one among many activities—such as establishing budget priorities and making purchasing decisions—that depend upon the review and approval of authorized members of an established corporate hierarchy. Therefore, business communication instructors must not view the cycling process as a writing task divorced from its broader organizational context.

Introduction

In 1985, the term "document cycling" entered the lexicon of business communication. In a case study describing writing practices at Exxon ITD, Paradis, Dobrin, & Miller explicated a process involving supervisory review of documents composed by staff writers. This practice, designated by the term "document cycling," was defined as "the editorial process by which they [supervisors] helped staff members restructure, focus, and clarify their written work" (p. 285). The supervisory review may involve editing for content, style, organization, tone, or grammar (pp. 300, 301). Additional reviews may follow as the writer further refines text in accordance with the supervisor's recommendations; the document is "cycled" several times prior to final approval. At Exxon ITD, document cycling played a key role in making the individual's work advance the organization's established objectives (p. 293).

In their seminal study, Paradis et al. (1985) did not suggest that cycling is a phenomenon that may apply to writing practices beyond workplaces specializing in research and development tasks. However, subsequent researchers indicate that "document cycling" may be the most common form of collaborative writing in business and professional environments (Adam, 2000; Couture & Rymer, 1991; Couture & Rymer, 1993; Debs, 1993; Locker, 2006; Lunsford & Ede, 1990). Several studies indicate that this process may involve not merely a writer and supervisor or manager; document cycling can also encompass review by many individuals, including peers and stakeholders throughout an organization (Adam, 2000; Couture & Rymer, 1993; Locker, 2006; Smart, 1993; Weber, 1991).

Since the early 1990s, an extensive corpus of research, including case studies and surveys, has explored the practice of document cycling from multiple perspectives. Attention has especially focused upon the effects of cycling, both positive and detrimental, upon interpersonal relationships between writers and their reviewing supervisors (Couture & Rymer, 1993; Locker, 1992; Palmeri, 2004; Paradis et al., 1985; Smart, 1993). However, little research has considered the processes by which document cycling actually achieves its intended purpose: the transformation of a document, originally composed by a single author, into a text that has attained the sanction of corporate authority. Studies of the cycling phenomenon have not examined the organizational dynamics involved with the evolution of writing that originates as the voice of its original author and ultimately emerges as a pronouncement of the corporation.

Researchers have long recognized that organizational dynamics provide a broader context within which the document cycling process is sustained. However, identification and examination of these dynamics have often been relegated to the indefinite direction of "future research." Paradis et al. (1985), for example, comment that the editorial reviews that occur during cycling serve to shape documents composed by individual writers into texts that are "fitted to the organization's needs" (p. 306). Paradis et al. also note "we need a better understanding of how this process actually takes place" (p. 306). Debs (1993) asserts that we have only a "limited understanding of authorship as it is shaped in the workplace and the significance of the organization's role in authorizing tasks produced by its makers" (p. 160). As a result, Debs insists, we need "to unveil the organization, to identify more carefully the relationships that exist between the individual and groups within society" (p. 170). Locker (1992) maintains that "research on collaborative writing in the workplace cannot focus simply upon the group's activities but must consider the larger organizational context as well" (p. 59).

This study is intended to identify and investigate specific elements of the cycling process that permit—or inhibit—the gradual transformation of texts produced by individual writers into documents that represent the pronouncements of corporate authority. To borrow Debs's metaphor, the study attempts to "unveil" organizational dynamics that facilitate, or impede, the process of document cycling as a strategy intended to achieve corporate goals.

The results of a case study involving two writers who work in a Fortune 500 company will be presented. Both writers are employed in the information security function, the division of the organization responsible for the confidentiality, integrity, and accessibility of information processed and stored by the Company's computer systems. These writers were selected for this

study because (1) both are experienced with the process of document cycling and (2) these persons generate documents addressed to the Company's 23,000 employees and intended to define and communicate corporate policy. The study examines the invention and drafting processes of these writers. However, attention is primarily focused upon the organizational roles occupied by the authors and their reviewers and the manner by which power relations represented by these roles contribute to, or detract from, the ability of document cycling to attain corporate goals.

The study is guided by three research questions:

1. Has the cycling process, as exemplified by the two writers in this case study, resulted in the generation of documents that effectively contribute to organizational needs?
2. What elements of the cycling process facilitate, or impede, the transformation of single-authored texts into documents that have been granted corporate authority?
3. What are the pedagogical implications, if any, of the analysis of the document cycling process emerging from this study?

Method

The research method selected for this study is that of participant-observer ethnography, similar to that adopted by Smart (1993) in his examination of the writing processes used by policy and administrative staff at the Bank of Canada.

Between January 4 and September 18, 2006, I met daily for 20 minutes with two writers, Dan and Larry (pseudonyms, although both are male) to discuss the processes by which their texts are drafted, reviewed, revised, and, ultimately, published for corporate readership. In this timeframe, I conducted a total of 123 interviews; they focused upon the following issues:

1. What are your responsibilities within the organization?
2. What is your role in the corporation, especially in relation to your supervisor, other levels of senior management, technical specialists, reviewers of documents, and readers?
3. What documents currently occupy your time?
4. What are the purposes of the these documents, and who are the intended readers?
5. Have you recently met or communicated with technical specialists concerning the content of documents that you are currently drafting?
6. Are the contents of the documents sufficiently clear in your mind that you can compose a cogent and structured text?
7. How much time did you devote to writing during the previous day? What phase of the writing process (e.g., planning, drafting, editing, reviewing) was the focus of your attention?
8. Have you communicated with your supervisor or other reviewers concerning their reactions to the document? What suggestions or other comments have they offered?

9. Have you incorporated the comments of your supervisor and other reviewers into the draft document?
10. What obstacles, if any, have you encountered while preparing the document for publication? How will these obstacles be surmounted?
11. What feedback, if any, have you received concerning a published document?
12. Do you feel that the document cycling process generally results in the publication of documents that meet the organization's needs? Why or why not?

I retained written notes of the responses gathered during all interviews.

During the nine-month span of the study, Dan published 42 texts and Larry generated 20 documents. Frequent interaction with the writers was possible because I am a co-worker, employed in another department of the Information Security function. My work is not directly related to the work performed by Dan or Larry, although all three of us report to the same supervisor. I am also a friend of these colleagues, having known each for several years.

I informed Dan and Larry that their responses to interview questions and copies of any documents supplied to me—including electronic mail correspondence with supervisors and reviewers—would remain confidential.

In addition to the interviews, I was provided access to drafts of all documents generated by the writers, and also to copies of written comments prepared by reviewers and to the responses to these comments. In addition, I conducted two interviews with the writers' supervisor and other major stakeholders responsible for reviewing the documents (e.g., the Head of Internal Audit, the Global Compliance Officer assigned to Information Security, and Information Security Officers assigned to all affiliates and subsidiaries of the Corporation.) These interviews focused on the following topics:

1. As you read the documents submitted by Dan and Larry, what are your primary concerns—grammar, the mechanics of writing, accuracy and thoroughness of content, clarity of written expression, the potential reactions of other readers?
2. When you suggest changes to a text, do you propose alternate wording, offer a general direction for improvement, or both?
3. Do you expect all your suggestions to be reflected in the published documents?
4. Do you feel that the document cycling process generally results in the publication of documents that meet the organization's needs? Why or why not?

I also retained written notes of all responses to these interview queries.

Dan: Developer of corporate policy

Dan is currently 59 years old; he has worked in the field of information security for 22 years, the last seven of which have been at the Fortune 500 company. During the past five years, his work has focused entirely upon the production of written texts. Dan's experience and training is that of an information security specialist, not a professional writer. Like many employees in business

environments, he has been assigned writing tasks because management has determined that he "has a way with words."

His current work consists of developing the Company's information security policies and standards. As he explains, a policy is a "broad statement of the company's position concerning information security practices, such as appropriate email usage." A standard is "a more detailed description of provisions by which the company ensures that the policies are implemented. For example, the Company has an 'Authentication' standard that describes, among other details, the minimum length of passwords used to access computer systems."

Currently, the Company has six information security policies and 24 standards; each policy is approximately 10 pages in length, and standards are usually 4-8 pages long. Most documents consist of a numbered, and sometimes bulleted, list of rules that must be enforced throughout the Company to assure the security of corporate information processed by or stored in computer systems. One or more of the policies or standards are revised on a monthly basis, depending upon the concerns of senior management. According to Dan, these documents are developed because "they provide guidelines by which information technology professionals and employees in business units understand and comply with a set of authorized rules; the policies and standards ensure that acceptable practices—such as the minimum length of a password—do not have to be reinvented whenever a problem arises."

Most of Dan's writing consists of revising existing standards to resolve issues that, in the opinion of management, have become controversial or are perceived to fill gaps in current rules. Although Dan occasionally generates some of these revisions on his own initiative, most of the assignments originate from his supervisor, the Head of Information Security. This individual is also designated the corporate "owner" of all information security policies and standards and is considered responsible, by the organization's senior management, for the content of these documents. When a specific rule requires modification, Dan and his supervisor meet face-to-face and the supervisor describes a desired revision. This description is not usually an explicit formulation of the written rule; rather, the supervisor explains the problem requiring resolution and suggests general wording for the rule change. Prior to commencing a draft, Dan often must consult with technical specialists in order to clarify specific issues or to acquire a coherent, structured arrangement of ideas that can be comprehended by non-technical readers. Often, this phase of clarification is quite lengthy. "Once," Dan admitted, "we were developing a policy concerning the security of wireless networks. The topic is so complex, and is evolving at such a rapid rate, that I had to meet with telecommunications personnel for nearly a year before writing one word of the first draft."

Following his meetings with technicians, Dan drafts a proposed text, based on the supervisor's recommendations. During the drafting process, as the proposed text reveals logical gaps or transitions, Dan may further consult with other information security or technical specialists to obtain additional information. After the draft is prepared, Dan returns to his manager to review the wording. At this meeting, the supervisor may approve the whole of Dan's document, suggest further modification, or reject the proposal and recommend a re-write. Dan usually accepts these changes, although he occasionally proposes alternate wording that may further clarify the rule. The manager considers Dan's comments before making a final decision concerning the wording;

however, Dan cannot proceed with the cycling process until his supervisor has approved the document. On average, a document will be cycled, or reviewed, two times before supervisory approval is granted. In some instances, however, a single sentence may require a full month to draft.

After obtaining his manager's authorization, Dan forwards an email message, with the proposed rule change attached, to 16 members of the Information Security Steering Committee (ISSC). Members of this group comprise stakeholders throughout the Corporation whose functions involve oversight or implementation of the Company's information security program. These stakeholders include representatives of the Compliance Division, the Internal Audit function, and information security managers in all corporate subsidiaries throughout the world. Dan's email message requests each member to review the proposed text, to offer comments or alternate wording, and to email his or her suggestions to Dan within a few days.

Although the individuals belonging to this committee are all concerned with developing a strong security program, the members do not interact as a group. Rather, they are expected to offer responses that reflect the unique concerns and practices of their own divisions or geographic locations. Most members of the committee provide no feedback. However, whenever Dan forwards a "request for comments," at least one individual offers a response. In many instances, the comments are editorial—requests to modify one or two words. Occasionally, stakeholders will propose alternate text that modifies the meaning of the original draft.

Dan develops a summary of all responses and reviews this summary with his supervisor. Suggested editorial changes are generally accepted, unless they are clearly inaccurate or inappropriate. Together, Dan and the supervisor discuss responses that may alter the document's original meaning; if the proposal represents an improved formulation of the proposed rule, and if it preserves the intent of the rule, the suggestion will be approved. However, if a comment alters the purpose of the rule, the supervisor will reject it. In these instances, the supervisor will personally contact the individual who has objected to the rule and negotiate a settlement. Although the supervisor would prefer that a final policy reflect a consensus of stakeholders, complete agreement is not always possible. In these instances, Dan's supervisor—the Head of Information Security—has a corporate responsibility to ensure that suggestions that are not technically feasible, or impossible to implement due to resource or other constraints, will not be incorporated into corporate policy.

After this final session with his supervisor, Dan incorporates all approved changes into the revised policy and forwards it, via email, to the bank's Compliance Division for publication. "I'm always careful," Dan mentioned, "that the email message contains the sentence: 'This modification has been approved by the senior management of Information Security.' Also, I always send a copy of the final document to my supervisor." Within two days, the new text is published in the Company's Policy Directory, a Lotus Notes database accessible to all employees worldwide. Dan's name does not appear on the document; however, the title of his supervisor, the "Head of Information Security," is described as the policy "owner."

Larry: Corporate security educator

Larry is 55 years old and has been employed at the Company for nearly 30 years. During his first two decades with the organization, Larry worked as a programmer and as a supervisor of information technology personnel. He joined the information security function about 10 years ago, and has been writing security awareness bulletins for approximately half that time. Like Dan, Larry is assigned to writing tasks because his managers are pleased with his clear prose and its conversational tone; however, Larry's formal education and training is that of a technician, not a writer or professional communicator.

Larry's awareness bulletins are written for an intended readership of all Company employees, nearly 23,000 worldwide. These bulletins, called "Smart Tips", are brief messages—usually no more than two full computer screens in length—intended to provide instruction concerning good security practices. Many of these practices are applicable to computer users in any organization: never share your passwords with another person; don't open email messages from an untrusted source. Occasionally, however, the messages refer to policies unique to the Company: always select a password that is at least eight characters in length; never divulge personal information concerning customers to non-employees.

Larry writes at least one awareness message each month. His supervisor frequently selects the topics of these bulletins, although any employee of the Company can suggest potential subjects. Occasionally, Larry develops topics on his own initiative.

His writing process proceeds in defined stages. First, he selects a title intended to draw the reader's attention (e.g., "Have You Been Spoofed Lately?"). Then, in the first paragraph, Larry relates an anecdote or describes a recent event that serves as "lead-in" to the basic lesson. As he explains, "I try to adopt a conversational tone that will be friendly while, at the same time, cause the reader to become engaged with the subject." After the first paragraph, Larry introduces a specific "best practice." He explains why employees should adopt this practice and often provides "how-to" instructions if the topic describes a behavior or procedure. The Smart Tip concludes by informing employees that they may send an email to Larry if they have additional questions or request further assistance.

In the process of composing his message, Larry may require clarification concerning Corporate policy, legal issues, or technical matters. When this specialized information is required, Larry consults with subject matter experts within the organization. As with Dan, this process of obtaining information is often time-consuming. "One of my Smart Tips," Larry explained, "dealt with the importance of employees making copies of information stored on their Company-owned laptops. Unfortunately, there was no authorized method for making these copies. Dan and I had to meet with seven different technical specialists before I could write a document that described one method that all could agree upon. These meetings took nearly two months!"

After completing his first draft, Larry sends a copy via email to his supervisor. Only rarely does the manager correct spelling, grammar, or mechanical errors. Rather, the supervisor reviews the document to ensure that information is accurate and that the text conveys its intended message. Sometimes, the manager eliminates specific words and substitutes new terms or phrases deemed more appropriate. Larry occasionally discusses these suggestions and persuades his supervisor that the original wording is more consistent with the document's purpose. More frequently,

however, Larry accepts the manager's recommendations. As with documents produced by Dan, Larry's work will usually be reviewed an average of two times prior to approval.

When the supervisor's review is complete and Larry has revised the document to conform to the recommendations, he forwards a copy of the document to a representative of the Corporate Communications Division. Corporate Communications is responsible for reviewing and approving all documents sent via email to employees. Even though Larry's Smart Tips will be transmitted under his own name, Corporate Communications must ensure that the text contains no content that may deemed offensive or inappropriate.

Several years ago, when Larry commenced writing his security awareness bulletins, he frequently encountered conflicts with Corporate Communications. "They really didn't understand why or what I was writing," he confessed. "At first, Corporate Communications felt that the content and tone of many messages conveyed subtle, inappropriate subtexts. When I wrote a message explaining that employees should not share their passwords, the Communications Division claimed I was implying that the employees were careless and oblivious to the need for confidentiality. When I prepared a Smart Tip about the dangers of opening email messages from unknown sources, Communications said that I should not frighten the staff." Apparently, the Information Security and Communications Divisions maintained divergent perspectives concerning the anticipated reactions to security awareness messages. In fact, these perspectives were sufficiently dissimilar that Larry's supervisor was required to meet with Corporate Communications personnel and clarify the needs of Information Security. The meeting was successful, and these conflicts were not repeated. Since that time, the reviews conducted by Corporate Communications have consisted primarily of correcting grammatical errors and copyediting text to replace infelicitous wording. For example, Larry once introduced a sentence with the phrase: "The Bank's employees." Corporate Communications, recognizing that the organization includes subsidiaries and affiliates that are not banks, altered the phrase to a more inclusive "The Company's employees."

Larry says that his supervisor "doesn't want to see the revisions made by Corporate Communications, because they have the final approval concerning the contents of documents. I am ready to publish after Communications completes its edit." Thus, following any corrections and modifications made by the representative of Corporate Communications, Larry forwards an email copy of the message to all Company employees. He is clearly attributed as author of the text, and many employees respond to him directly if they request clarification of the contents.

Discussion

1. Has the cycling process, as exemplified by the two writers in this case study, resulted in the generation of documents that effectively contribute to organizational needs?

Since April 2003 Dan has written 30 policies and standards and also composed 192 revisions to these documents; Larry has published 86 SmartTips during the same timeframe. The policies, standards, and security awareness bulletins have received favorable review from Internal Audit, the Company's external auditors, and from state and federal bank examiners. In addition, senior managers from other financial service organizations have contacted Dan and Larry to obtain

advice concerning methods for producing policies and security awareness bulletins. All individuals interviewed—including the two writers, their supervisor, and major reviewers—agreed that the document cycling process exemplified by Dan and Larry resulted in the generation of documents that effectively contributed to organizational needs. Most respondents indicated that document cycling was an efficient method of generating text when time constraints are a significant consideration. Also, the majority of persons interviewed believed that cycling ensures that individuals most affected by policies will have an influence upon the contents of finished documents. Assessed by these factors, it seems that the document cycling process, as practiced by these writers, is an effective method for generating text that has a "strategic impact" (Lowry, Curtis, & Lowry, 2004, p. 95) upon the Company.

2. What elements of the cycling process facilitate, or impede, the transformation of single-authored texts into documents that have been granted corporate authority?

An integral element of the cycling process, as exemplified in this study, is the role played by corporate "gatekeepers" during the cycling process. For Dan, the primary gatekeeper is his supervisor; for Larry, Corporate Communications performs this function. A "gatekeeper" may be defined as an individual responsible for granting approval for the publication of a document. In this capacity, the gatekeeper has authority to determine content, to make editorial corrections, and to reject wording that is deemed inappropriate. Gatekeepers retain the power to transform text written by a single individual into a document that reflects and articulates a corporate perspective. This power is not a merely arbitrary assumption of authority. Rather, the gatekeepers who oversee the work produced by Dan and Larry are also individuals held responsible by their senior management for the contents of documents. Dan's supervisor, for example, is considered the owner of information security policies and is accountable for their effectiveness. Similarly, Corporate Communications has been granted authority to ensure that all email messages transmitted to employees accurately represent a corporate perspective.

An equally significant element of the document cycling process exemplified by Dan and Larry is that all participants occupy unique roles within the organization and these roles are structured within a hierarchy of power relations. The most obvious of these power relations exists between Dan, Larry, and their supervisor. However, relationships of power are not necessarily determined by the structure of a formal corporate organization chart. For example, the representative of Corporate Communications holds the title of Managing Director, the same title held by Dan and Larry's supervisor. Yet the supervisor recognizes that Corporate Communications retains ultimate authority concerning the publication of awareness bulletins. The reviewers of policy documents, even though they may retain high status on a formal organization chart, recognize that Dan and Larry's supervisor is usually responsible for the contents of security policy; therefore, the reviewers defer to the supervisor as the final arbiter concerning the contents of policies and standards. It seems, therefore, that the hierarchy of power relations—and the concept of "gatekeeper"—are both based upon the assignment of corporate responsibility for a specific function. The Head of Information Security, for example, is held accountable for the contents of policies; the Corporate Communications function is assigned responsibility for messages transmitted to all employees. The document-cycling process must occur in accordance with these recognized power relationships.

3. What are the pedagogical implications, if any, of the analysis of the document cycling process emerging from this study?

Collaborative writing, as described in many business communication textbooks, is often described as an effort involving a group of authors jointly contributing to a single document. However, as mentioned previously, research does not sustain this view. Indeed, most prior research concerning collaborative writing in workplace environments emphasizes that document cycling—single-authored documents reviewed by supervisors and other stakeholders—is the most common form of collaboration. From this perspective, the case study of Dan and Larry has potential pedagogical significance.

The process of document cycling, as described in this study and in prior research (Adam, 2000; Couture & Rymer, 1993; Freedman & Adam, 2000; Lowry, Curtis, & Lowry, 2004; Paradis, et al., 1985; Paré, 2000; Smart, 1993), involves individuals who are assigned specific roles within an organization. In turn, these roles are structured within formal or informal power relationships. Although Dan and Larry may engage in dialogic interaction with their supervisor and others, the writers recognize that they do not retain authority to transform their texts into pronouncements that reflect corporate perspectives. Only the "gatekeeper" can perform this function.

From a pedagogical perspective, this form of document cycling may be simulated with exercises that incorporate specific roles, a power hierarchy, and a gatekeeper. For example, the instructor can divide the class into groups of three. One student in each group assumes the role of a staff writer, one represents the writer's supervisor, and the third adopts the persona of a representative of Corporate Communications. All students are presented with a checklist of guidelines that specifies the major concerns of each role. Checklists will include a description of the document purpose (the text should have broad corporate implications, such as a Human Resources policy), its approximate length (perhaps no more than 250 words), and its intended audience (e.g., all employees). Additionally, the writer's checklist will explain expectations concerning language and style. The supervisor's list will include the task of assessing accuracy of contents. Corporate Communications is charged with ensuring that documents will not reflect adversely upon the organization or any employee and also that text is grammatically correct. Each member of the group will receive a copy of all three checklists.

After completing an acceptable draft, the "writer" will submit the document to the "supervisor" for review. Face-to-face discussion of the supervisor's comments will occur, and the writer will have an opportunity to negotiate differing views with the supervisor; however, the latter retains authority concerning the contents of the document. In addition, both writer and supervisor must consider the likely reactions of Corporate Communications, the third reviewer, when conducting their revisions. The writer and supervisor continue to cycle, or review, the text until an acceptable product is generated.

The representative of Corporate Communications, the ultimate gatekeeper, will next review the document. Suggestions and comments should reflect the perspective of this function; however, the writer and supervisor will retain the right to dissent and offer persuasive arguments regarding alternate views. However, only Corporate Communications has authority to grant approval for publication.

The full simulation is intended to focus upon the process of revising texts multiple times, a process driven by the needs and expectations of individuals who occupy differing roles within a corporate hierarchy. Students are thus provided an opportunity to experience the manner by which textual content and rhetorical features of written documents are influenced by the roles and responsibilities assigned to individuals within an organization. Most important, the exercise focuses upon the significance of a gatekeeper who must approve the completed text in order to grant to it the status of an authorized corporate statement.

This process is repeated two more times within the group, to provide an opportunity for each student to assume one of the roles. Evaluation of each group's effort will consider the adequacy with which members have assumed specific roles, the appropriateness of reviewers' suggestions, the effectiveness of personal interaction between the writer and reviewers, and the extent to which the final written product addresses its originally stated purpose.

Conclusion

Commencing with the publication of the Paradis et al. (1985) study that identified document cycling as a integral element of writing in the workplace, numerous researchers have examined cycling as a method of conducting collaborative editing. This study identifies an additional function performed by cycling. More specifically, the case study of Dan and Larry demonstrates that document cycling serves to transform single-authored texts into pronouncements that reflect and articulate a corporate perspective. Two major factors contribute to this transformation: (1) the presence of an hierarchy of power relations, comprised of clearly demarcated sets of roles and responsibilities and (2) the existence of "gatekeepers" who are assigned responsibility to grant corporate authority to documents that meet specific criteria. Document-cycling, as exemplified by Dan and Larry, occurs within the broader context of the organizational dynamics created by these power relations. Thus, cycling is not merely a form of collaborative writing; rather, this process is one among many activities—such as establishing budget priorities and making purchasing decisions—that depend upon the review and approval of authorized members of an established corporate hierarchy.

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