Getting the code: Measuring meaning through content analysis

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Meaning in organizations

- Identity
- Framing
- Discourse
- Ideology
- Beliefs and values
- Justification
- Legitimacy
- Reputations
Different ways to measure meaning

• Proxies
  – E.g., founding or adoption rates; prevalence

• Measuring meaning directly through content analysis of text
  – Artifacts/documents (Bechky 2003)
  – Newspaper event analysis
Documents

• Organizational documents convey meaning about an organization’s identity, culture, and impression management.

• E.g., annual reports, mission statements, letters to shareholders
Example: Identities of Arizona charter schools

- **Goal:** measure dimensions of organizational identities in Arizona’s charter schools

- **Document:** State-mandated report cards (issued annually)

- **Document audience:** Students, potential students, and their families; anyone else evaluating school quality
Children's Success Academy provides an outstanding school environment that allows all children, especially challenging children, to develop their intrinsic capacities and gifts, and to flourish at the highest levels. The school environment includes the Nurtured Heart Approach (positive behavioral program), the Nurtured Body Approach (nutritional program) and a values-based globally-oriented curriculum that stresses problem solving and community service.

--- Organization and Philosophy ---

- Charter School
- Positive Behavior Recognition Program
- Healthy Nutrition Program
- Values & Service-based Global Curriculum

--- Instructional Programs ---

- Technology - Multiple Computers/Class
- School Garden Project
- Full-day Kindergarten
- At-risk Programs
- Community Service Programs
- Virtues Project

--- School/Academic Goals ---

- Excellence in science and mathematics - 80% of students to exceed grade-level standards (as measured by AIMS and Stanford 9).

- Excellence in language arts and social studies - 80% of students to exceed grade-level standards (as measured by AIMS and Stanford 9).

- Excellence in problem-solving skills, as measured by results of academic research and learning to identify and enable community service projects.

- Mastery and fluency in reading and writing English (for ESL students); mastery and fluency in reading and writing Spanish - fourth and fifth grades.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Elements</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantive theme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values and virtues</td>
<td>133</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning processes</td>
<td>106</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montessori or other curriculum</td>
<td>103</td>
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<tr>
<td>Back-to-basics</td>
<td>98</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gifled/college-oriented</td>
<td>92</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patriotism/citizenship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science/technology</td>
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<td>Social justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>Resources and services</td>
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<td>Computer support and training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library/media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social services for students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Before/after care</td>
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<td>Recreation facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social services for adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>GED/adult education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full day kindergarten</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts facilities</td>
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<td>Employment services for students</td>
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<td>Pre-school/childcare</td>
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<td>Tutoring services</td>
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<td>Health/legal services for students</td>
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<td>Employment services for adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer/winter camp</td>
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<td>ESL/citizenship classes</td>
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<td>Target population</td>
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<td>High school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior high</td>
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<tr>
<td>At-risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic/gifted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
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<td>At-home students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total schools</td>
<td>298</td>
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</table>
Figure 1: Map of Charter School Organizational Form

Identity mandates
- Provide education
- Increase student test scores
- Attain resources by recruiting students
- Open enrollment
- School board administration

Flexible elements
- Back-to-basics
- Gifted/college-oriented
- Patriotism/citizenship
- Science/technology
- Social justice
- Computers
- ESL/Citizenship
- GED/Adult Education
- Library/media
- Preschool
- Summer/winter camp
- Academic/gifted
- High school

CAL elements
- Arts theme
- Learning processes
- Values and virtues
- Specific curriculum
- Arts facilities
- Before and after care
- Full-day kindergarten
- Recreation facilities
- Tutoring services
- At-home students
- Elementary
- Junior high

FSP elements
- Employment theme
- Employment services/adults
- Employment services/student
- Health/legal services/adult
- Health/legal services/student
- Social services/adult
- Social services/student
- At-risk

Ethnic identity
Newspaper event coding

- Events represent particular moments in time where meaning is conveyed or negotiated.

- Content analysis can be used to track different sets of meanings in the same newspaper coverage of an event
  - Opportunity for framing

- E.g., coverage of boycotts tells both the boycotters’ and corporation’s sides of the story
Challenges

• **Multiple audience issues**
  – Documents are snapshots intended for one of many audiences

• **Selection issues**
  – Survivor bias
  – Organizational bias (e.g., big firms)
  – Journalist bias
  – Impression management bias