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# THE VIRTUAL OFFICE: HRM LEGAL, POLICY, AND PRACTICE ISSUES

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## ABSTRACT

*It's been nearly thirty years since Chris Kern coined the term "virtual office" (Kern, 2008 & 1983). Since then, a number of other terms have become synonymous with the term, including telecommuting and telework (Mayhew, 2012). Estimates of the number of employees who work outside the traditional work environment vary, from 2.9 million to 33.7 million (Meinert, 2011). Numerous environmental and economic factors have been identified in the literature as stimulating the use of the virtual office including high gas prices, globalization, changing workforce demographics, and advances in information and communications technology (Riley, Mandavilli, and Heino 2000, and Meinert, 2011). As these factors continue to evolve and influence human resource decision making, the legal environment has become an important variable in organizational efforts to reap the benefits of the virtual office. The purpose of this paper is to examine the legal, policy, and employee relations issues associated with a virtual office.*

## INTRODUCTION

It's been nearly thirty years since Chris Kern coined the term "virtual office" (Kern, 2008 & 1983). Since then, a number of other terms have become synonymous with the term, including telecommuting and telework (Mayhew, 2012). Estimates of the number of employees who work outside the traditional work environment vary, from 2.9 million to 33.7 million (Meinert, 2011). Numerous environmental and economic factors have been identified in the literature as stimulating the use of the virtual office including high gas prices, globalization, changing workforce demographics, and advances in information and communications technology (Riley, Mandavilli, and Heino 2000, and Meinert, 2011). As these factors continue to evolve and influence human resource decision making, the legal environment has become an important variable in organizational efforts to reap the benefits of the virtual office. The purpose of this paper is to examine the legal, policy, and employee relations issues associated with a virtual office.

Even before Kern coined the phrase "virtual office" in 1983, "organizational designers and social activists in the 1970s" were examining alternatives to help American business respond to the fall-out created by the 1973 Arab Oil Embargo (Riley, Mandavilli, and Heino, 2000 & Admin, 2009). This was also a period when the conservation movement began to gain traction in response to the need to develop "alternatives to the energy consumption, traffic problems, and

pollution caused by everyday commuting in the United States" (Riley, Mandavilli, and Heino 2000). Those same issues that spawned interest in the virtual office in the 1970's are still influencing the movement today. As gas prices continue above $3.00 a gallon and the economy continues to sputter, organizations and their employees are looking for ways to minimize the cost of commuting.

Just how many organizations and employees are working in virtual offices is a difficult number to calculate. Estimates vary from "2.9 million individuals to 33.7 depending on who you count and where you get your figures" (Meinert, 2011). The Telework Research Network reports from their survey data that in 2008, 2.8 million people consider their home their primary place of work and that another 20 to 30 million people currently work from home at least one day a week (Telework Network, 2012). One thing is consistent across those reporting the use of the virtual office, telework, and telecommuting. The number of employees and organizations involved in the use of these flexible work arrangements has been increasing dramatically in recent years. Further, as the pace of technological change continues to move forward, firms' ability and the feasibility of expanded use of flexible work arrangements should continue to drive additional increases in their use.

## LEGAL ISSUES

Organizations that have utilized the virtual office have encountered a wide variety of HRM legal issues. Chief among these issues that have been noted in the literature are: compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act's (FLSA) overtime provisions, accommodation issues associated with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), workers compensation and Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) issues, confidentiality concerns, and copyright infringement have been noted in the literature. Additional legal issues include state tax law complications and the tax treatment of employer provided equipment utilized by telecommuters (Horner, 2011).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires employers with 15 or more employees to provide reasonable accommodation for qualified applicants and employees with disabilities. Reasonable accommodation is any change in the work environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables an individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of their job. Employers may not be required to provide specific accommodations if they can show that it would cause significant difficulty or expense (undue hardship) (EEOC, 2012). The ADA does not require an employer to offer a virtual office option as a matter of policy but, if the employer does offer telework options, it must allow employees with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate. Even if the employer does not have a telework program in place, the location where work is performed may fall under the ADA's reasonable accommodation requirement of modifying the workplace policies, even if the employer does not allow other employees to telework (EEOC, 2005). This is another legal area that involves "state-specific" laws and regulations (Bruce, 2011).

Workers compensation issues associated with the virtual office revolve around the issue question of whether or not an injury arouse in the "course of employment" and the area of

workers compensation recovery (Genova, 2010). Workers compensation laws do not generally distinguish between home-based and office-based workers. The analysis as to coverage "turns on whether the injury or illness can be said to have arose out of and in the course of employment" (Kellner, 2000). Workers compensation case law in general can be complicated and even more so when a telecommuting employee is involved.

Section 5 (a) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act) provides that each employer "shall furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees" (29 USC 654, 2012).

Confidentiality issues are associated with remote workers utilizing proprietary information. In spite of the availability of advanced security protocols, information utilized and shared in the virtual office is "more vulnerable to interception and sabotage by hackers, and/or inadvertent loss or destruction by employees" (McCoy, 2007).

## EMPLOYEE RELATIONS ISSUES

A number of key employee relations issues must also be addressed. Is assignment to the virtual office right for current employees? Often cited issues with respect to whether telecommuting is appropriate for an individual are whether individuals are able to work independently and are able to practice self-discipline (Mayhew, 2012, Leonard, 2011, Meinert, 2011, & Kellner, 2000). In addition to being self-disciplined, employees must have good written communication skills to communicate "easy-to-understand and to-the-point communications" when they are operating in the virtual office (Leonard, 2011).

## POLICY AND PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

Effectively dealing with the plethora of legal issues facing organizations considering use of the virtual office begins with the development of clear legally based policies and practices. Compliance with the FLSA wage and hour regulations has been identified most often as the number one issue. Employers must properly determine the exempt status of employees regarding their entitlement to overtime compensation. Development of good job descriptions is a start to making the proper determination. Employees who are not exempt must be properly monitored, and supervisors and the organization must ensure that proper tracking and record keeping systems are in place (Bruce, 2011). In states like California, the "employers must ensure that telecommuting employees are taking their required meal and rest breaks" to avoid compensable time issues (Bruce, 2011).

While under the FLSA, employers are not required to compensate employees for small amounts of time that are "insubstantial or insignificant", employers should develop a policy to make sure "BlackBerry time" does not become a problem. A policy that limits when non-exempt employees are required to have their remote technology active has been utilized by a number of organizations to minimize this issue (Genova, 2010). If employers are utilizing

independent contractor status with respect to their telecommuters, remember that misuse of this status is under "heavy scrutiny" by regulators (O'Brien, 2012).

With respect to ADA compliance, employers are not required by law to offer virtual office options, but it is well established that providing someone the opportunity to telework may be a reasonable accommodation.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The use of the virtual office to facilitate more efficient and effective of human resources is not a passing fad. As the global business environment continues to expand, change in the composition of the labor force continues to drive the demand for more flexible work arrangements, and organizations attempt to reign in the cost of doing business more and more organizations are pursuing virtual office options. Survey after survey indicates that as organizations look to respond to a wide range of economic and social forces, the use of the virtual office will only increase. If organizations are to reap the potential benefits of the virtual office, managing the HR related legal issues is critical. Good planning, sound policy, effective training, and performance management can help organizations more effectively manage the legal risk associated with those issues.

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# ENVIRONMENTAL JOLT TRANSFORMS THE LOUISIANA SENIOR ASSISTED LIVING INDUSTRY

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**John T. Lambert, Jr., The University of Southern Mississippi**

## ABSTRACT

*In the year 2012 as this manuscript is authored, the scars of Hurricanes Katrina and to a somewhat lesser extent, Hurricane Rita, are still visible throughout Louisiana. The impact of these two hurricanes to the business environment and to the stakeholders of the Louisiana Senior Assisted Living Industry are explored in this research and documented in this manuscript. Population migration from areas of devastation and the its relocation and resettlement in less-impacted areas was followed by the dissolution of immobile firms, and the reestablishment of firms in those areas. Utilizing data from Louisiana State and from federal sources, this research shows this phenomena.*

# DEFINING COLLEGIALITY:
# SORTING WRITTEN BEHAVIORAL EXAMPLES FROM EMPLOYEES INTO CATEGORIES

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**Sarah G. Sheldon, Western Kentucky University**
**Daniel R. Burton, Western Kentucky University**

## ABSTRACT

Collegiality has expanded from an unofficial to an official criterion for promotion, retention, and merit appraisals at many workplaces. For instance, collegiality has become a somewhat controversial "fourth" criterion for faculty evaluation in higher education, added to the "three pillars" of teaching, research, and service. This formalization of collegiality as an employee evaluative concept has driven some research. A recent conceptual paper identifies three primary dimensions of collegiality in the research and practitioner literature.

This paper uses a qualitative approach to the task of defining collegiality by examining reported employee behavioral examples rather than drawing from the existing literature. Employees from different occupations and industries were asked to provide rich examples of both "good collegiality" and "bad collegiality". A qualitative sorting of the hundreds of behavioral examples of collegiality collected was performed. Following a procedure similar to a q-sort technique, multiple judges were asked to independently sort the employee examples or items into stacks the judge believed to be similar.

Statistics were computed between each judge's items and stacks as well as between the multiple judges. A focus group gave each resulting grouping a name to identify each sort. Finally, a comparison was made between the groupings found using this procedure with the dimensions of collegiality identified in the literature from the earlier article. Areas for future research on collegiality are suggested.

# MONETARY PLOICY CONVERGENCE IN THE NAFTA REGION:
# EVIDENCE FROM COINTEGRATION ANALYSIS AND CONTAGION EFFECTS

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**Mary H. Kelly, Texas A&M University-Central Texas**

## ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the evolving, time-variant, long-run equilibrium relationship among the target interbank interest rates of Canada, the United States and Mexico to assess whether or not monetary policy in the NAFTA region is truly converging, as suggested by the leaders of these countries at a recent meeting in Montebello, Canada. Only recently has is it become feasible to analyze monetary convergence in the NAFTA region, as rolling cointegration analysis requires long-term data, such as that used in this study for the period of 1997 through 2007. We also test for cross-border contagion effects from the financial difficulties faced by Countrywide Financial Corporation during the recent U.S. real estate meltdown. This study of empirical financial and economic phenomena employs multivariate cointegration test and, for robustness, calculates σ-convergence in the NAFTA region. Our findings support the hypothesis of monetary policy convergence in the region. In general, the analysis tends to confirm a broad, ongoing economic convergence in the NAFTA region. We also find support for the proposition of cross-border contagion effects from the financial difficulties faced by Countrywide, which adds robustness to the presence of monetary convergence.*

# USING CASE STUDIES TO PREPARE BUSINESS STUDENTS TO PERFORM:  A PRACTICAL APPLICATION

**Robert Matthews, Sam Houston State University**
**James Bexley, Sam Houston State University**
**Laura Sullivan, Sam Houston State University**

## ABSTRACT

*Case studies are a useful tool in teaching many business concepts. This paper examines the development of a case study to teach basic concepts in choice of business entity, with applicability to courses in accounting, finance, management, law, and entrepreneurship, and possibly others.  The discussion includes student feedback, steps taken to address issues, and impact on assessment of learning outcomes.*

## INTRODUCTION

Educators in many fields have long used case studies successfully as a teaching technique.  Cases can be prepared locally or obtained from a number of commercial sources. Bruner, et al (2010) noted that case studies provide an excellent tool in learning to apply business principles.  Kerzner (2009) found that project management was best taught through case studies. In another work Bruner (2007) emphasized how cases are beneficial in focusing on value. Stretcher and Michael (2005) offered cases along with a discussion on experiential learning. Porter (2001) noted that case quality was paramount to successful application.  Sulock and Dunkelberg (1977) noted the value of cases for skill development. We believe that cases have added much value to the field, and our goal in this paper is to interrelate more specifically application to theory in business-related fields.

Fleming and Mills (1992) identified four learning styles, represented by the acronym VARK—Visual, Aural, Read/write, and Kinesthetic.  Case studies appeal more to the kinesthetic learner in particular than other forms. Recognizing that different students have different learning styles, we have used a multi-faceted teaching progression that includes the following elements, with the learning styles most closely related to each facet indicated by the applicable letter:

- Students read the textbook and other written materials – R,
- Instructor covers the material read in lectures – V, A
- Students are given short quizzes in each class reviewing materials from the prior lecture – R
- Students are tested periodically with three to five examinations per semester – R
- Students apply the lessons learned to case studies - K

The authors came to the academic world after spending time in the private sector. Therefore we are inclined to favor the practical application element afforded by case studies. Based upon our private sector experience, and upon conversations with others in private sector, the primary difficulties that businesses see in recent university business graduates would appear to be:

- Working as a group member
- Making oral presentations
- Preparing written communications
- Thinking outside the box
- Dealing with ethical issues

Accordingly, we have case studies to address each of those efforts. We hope to share with the readers the techniques that we have used in applying this teaching style. We believe that the time needed to prepare the educational case studies produces students that are much better prepared to put theory into practice when they reach the workplace.

Although case application is not limited to one discipline, the example described in this paper addresses the selection of the proper business entity. This example can be used in accounting, finance, business law, entrepreneurship, or management classes, and possibly others. Feedback from employers hiring students trained using this approach has been overwhelmingly positive.

## A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

T        o provide a simple example, the following problem can be adapted for use in a finance, accounting, business law, or entrepreneurship course in which forms of business organization are addressed. The class is divided into five groups. The problem sequence is initiated by giving each of the groups the following information for Cases A through E, and having them determine the appropriate form of business organization to use in each case. Because Sam Houston State University is located in Texas, where the oil and gas industry figures prominently, the cases are developed around a fact scenario involving oil and gas exploration. The basic concepts may easily be adapted to any specific industry.

### Case A

You and your teammates operate Armadillo Oil Corporation, an independent oil and gas exploration company. You have just made a major oil and gas discovery in a prospect area in West Texas. You have leased the mineral rights from most of the applicable landowners, and now need to raise money to finance your drilling and development program. You have a considerable mass of data regarding the size and potential of this field, and you want to keep this information confidential at least until you can complete leasing up the mineral rights from remaining landowners in the prospect area. You have determined to form a new entity, into which your company will contribute the mineral leases, and investors will contribute cash to fund the drilling and development program. You will want to insulate your investors from personal liability for actions of the new entity. You want your parent company to exercise 100% of the management authority over the new entity, with your investors having no involvement in management.

## Case B

You are a family who recently inherited a ranch from your late uncle. Oil and gas has been found on outlying parts of the property, and you are currently receiving several hundred thousand dollars a month in royalties. The property includes multiple tracts, of which the largest is located in the center and has not been leased to any outside company. You want to form a company to drill and develop that tract, so that you will then receive 100% of the revenues from those wells instead of the 12.5% royalty that you are currently receiving. Because the income potential is huge, and because you all have experience in the oil and gas industry, you are confident that you can run such a company. You all want to limit your individual liability for the actions of the company. You all want to participate actively in the management of the company. You all want to be able to pass the tax advantages of oil and gas exploration through to yourselves individually, rather than having the company pay taxes at its level and distribute after-tax earnings as dividends. Several of you are interested in living in other states, and the company may want to conduct oil and gas operations in those areas at some point. You will need a form of organization that is recognized and treated similarly in all those jurisdictions. Your existing royalties should be sufficient to fund initial drilling and development activities, and you believe that the ultimate production will generate sufficient cash to finance future operations, so attracting outside investors is not a consideration.

## Case C

You and your teammates have just developed a new process for computerized interpretation of seismic data for use in oil and gas exploration. You utilize personal computers with software that you have developed to perform limited interpretation of seismic survey data on a real-time basis, and to transmit the data via satellite communications connection to large computers owned by client oil companies, which will perform more sophisticated analysis instantaneously. As a result the time required to process seismic survey data can be reduced from several months to instantaneously. This invention has the potential to revolutionize the whole oil and gas exploration process. You need to raise significant cash to get your operation going, and will want to do a public stock offering as soon as the market is right. Your primary concern is your ability to go to the stock market to raise capital as soon as possible. You and your teammates are not particularly concerned about individual tax consequences of this transaction, but you do want to limit your individual liability for acts of your business entity. You are also concerned about protecting the intellectual property rights that you have in the process.

## Case D

You and your teammates have been sent to the US as representatives of the Shangri-La National Oil Company (SLANOCO). Your objective is to establish a US company that will enter into agreements with other US companies to:
- Conduct exploration in Shangri-La, a country on the Indian Ocean coast of Asia with what are believed to be significant undeveloped oil and gas reserves, both inland and offshore,
- Acquire the rights to use new technology developed by US companies, in order to develop the Shangri-La oil and gas production more quickly and efficiently, and
- Export oil and gas produced in Shangri-La to the US, and market it in the US.

SLANOCO will own 100% of in the US company as a wholly owned subsidiary. Taxes are not a significant consideration.

## Case E

You and your teammates are a group of oil and gas marketers. You wish to from an independent marketing company, which will buy oil and gas from producers and sell it to users directly and/or through the applicable

commodity exchanges.  Each of you wants to be actively involved in the management of the business.  Each of you wants to limit your individual liability for company actions.  You want to avoid double taxation.   The need to raise capital from investors is not a major factor in your choice of entity, but you would like to retain the maximum flexibility to admit future owners as your business grows.  You do not anticipate doing business, or having owners, in any jurisdiction that does not recognize the LLC form of organization similarly to Texas.

The problem scenarios are set up to point Case A toward forming a limited partnership with a corporate general partner, Case B toward forming an S corporation, Case C toward forming a publicly-held corporation, Case D toward forming a C corporation, and Case E toward forming an limited liability company.  Obviously, in some cases more than one form may be acceptable.  Once this analysis is completed, each group is assigned a particular fact situation and is assigned to research the forms that must be completed and other steps required to form the particular form of organization, and preparing hypothetical documents to establish the form of organization for their particular case.  Once the groups have formed their companies, the problem set continues by giving them one or more further scenarios to resolve.  These are tailored to emphasize various financial, accounting, and legal (intellectual property, employment and agency, tort, contract, and real property) issues.

For each group problem, students are graded based upon three component activities:

- A group written report (3-5 pages) briefly discussing the situation, the alternatives, the decisions made and the supporting rationale.
- A verbal presentation in class
- A one page individual after-action report highlighting lessons learned

The students really "get into" the cases and it is quite surprising how competitively they approach the follow-on scenarios involving litigation and negotiation.

## RESULTS

The effectiveness of the case study approach has been evaluated based upon student surveys, student performance in the Assurance of Learning (AoL) assessment process, and informal input from employers.

First, a group of 82 students from three classes utilizing a significant number of case studies were surveyed regarding the use of case studies.  Students were asked to evaluate three criteria—enjoyment, assistance in learning, and usefulness of materials—on a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best).  The average of the student evaluations has been as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Enjoyment | 3.71 |
| Assistance in learning | 4.02 |
| Usefulness | 4.22 |

The relatively few negative comments from students primarily involved the difficulty in assigning individual grades and the somewhat related difficulty in getting recalcitrant group members to participate. Three approaches have been used to address this issue:

- Creating a reporting grid enabling groups to take points away from members who did less and transfer them to others who did more, with the proviso that the net change for the group as a whole must equal zero.
- Creating a workspace in the online learning management system where students can exchange ideas, and which faculty can monitor to determine student participation.
- Requiring group members to submit, in addition to the group reports, an individual one-page after-action report summarizing the issues addressed by their group, the decisions reached and the rationale for those decisions, and a summary of lessons learned.

Second, the effectiveness of the case approach can also be evaluated based upon performance by students in the Assurance of Learning (AoL) assessment process. With respect to the simple case discussed above, we can consider the performance by students in sections utilizing that approach with performance of students in other sections in the business organizations subject area. For example, the assessment scores for all students in the introduction to business law course for the business entity subject area averaged 71% in academic year 2009-10 and 80% in 2010-11. For students in sections where this problem set was used, the assessment scores for the business entities section were 83.7% in 2009-10 and 87.6% in 2010-11. The overall scores improved from 2009-10 to 2010-11 because this subject area was emphasized more in 2010-11 as a reaction to what were considered unsatisfactory results in 2009-10. In both years, the students using the simple case outlined above scored higher than their peer group. We have not performed additional work to determine the source of the differential noted, but it is an untested possibility that the case studies were useful in reaching the kinesthetic learners.

Third, informal feedback from employers has indicated that this additional experience places the students anywhere from three to six months ahead of students without this focus. Such an increase in performance capability saves the employer a lot of training dollars, a fact that makes the students much more valuable in today's economic environment.

## CONCLUSION

Applying the time-proven case study applications in the classroom addresses many issues. Students are required to:

- Have specific subject matter knowledge and expertise,
- Demonstrate that they are able to apply these facts in solving a situation presented to them in a manner similar to what will actually be encountered in the business world.
- Solve problems using logical thinking skills,
- Hone interpersonal relationship skills and communications skills that will better prepare them to perform at a higher level when employed after graduation.

The usefulness of case studies assigned to groups of students has been evaluated through student evaluations, assessment of learning results, and informal comments from employers. These data indicate that group case studies are a useful and helpful component of the teaching process.

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# IDENTIFYING ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE AFFECTING LEARNING ORGANIZATION

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## ABSTRACT

*In trying to successfully respond to a world of interdependence and change, some companies are adopting the principles of a Learning Organization. However, while promoting a Learning Organization, the organizational climate may exert an influence on the behavior of employees. Consequently, the researchers believe that an appropriate organizational climate is needed to facilitate the efforts of the Learning Organization. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the different organizational climates on Learning Organizations' various learning dimensions. Data was gathered through questionnaires from 101 employees working in small and medium size companies from different industries. The results of the statistical analysis indicated that organizational climates do affect the various dimensions of the Learning Organizations. It also identified the organizational climates that significantly affect a given LO dimension and their degree of influence. In addition, this study also determined the best combination of climates that affect a particular LO dimension.*

## INTRODUCTION

In these turbulent times, "the only constant is change" (Heraclitus, undated). However, change can be daunting sometimes. One of the new approaches to embracing change in organizations is by transforming their organizational culture. Thus, in order to successfully respond to a world of interdependence and change, some companies are adopting the principles of a Learning Organization. Learning Organization refers to a culture that has developed the capacity to adapt and change continuously by promoting a learning environment that embraces both individual and organizational learning (Robbins and Judge, 2011). Nevertheless, to facilitate this transition, the proper organizational climate that can aid in this process is needed. Hence, the purpose of this research is to investigate whether certain organizational climates promote a Learning Organization.

Ideally, a Learning Organization is "skilled at creating, acquiring, and transforming knowledge, and at modifying behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights" (Garvin, 1993, p. 80). It demands that an organization makes a conscious effort to facilitate learning activities and generate adaptation and development capabilities (Lien et al., 2006).

Nowadays, organizations are under severe pressure to learn faster and effectively in order to grow and outperform their competitors (Garvin, 1993). A Learning Organization has the capacity to empower people within and outside the workspace. This will increase both productivity and learning (Marquart, 1999). Past research has indicated the Learning

Organization's positive relation with knowledge performance (Power and Waddell, 2004; Selden, 1998), commitment, lower turnover, and employee satisfaction (Egan et al. 2004; Ellinger et al., 2002; Sta. Maria and Watkins, 2003).

Watkins and Marsick (2003) developed a survey that assesses learning activities at all levels within the organization. According to Watkins and Marsick, there are seven dimensions essential for an organization to become a Learning Organization: Continuous Learning (creating opportunities for continuous learning), Inquiry and Dialogue (promoting feedback, communication, trust and respect), Team Learning (encouraging team learning and collaboration), Embedded Systems (integrating systems to capture and share learning), Empowerment (empowering employees toward a collaborative vision), System Connections (linking the organization to its environment and community), and Strategic Leadership (providing leadership by supporting and strategically utilizing learning).

In sum, a Learning Organization is an organization that facilitates learning for all its members and consciously transforms itself and its context (Pedler et al., 1991). According to Senge (1990), organizations learn best only when individuals are willing to learn. Pritchard & Karasick (1973) argued that organizational climates exert an influence on the behavior of employees. Consequently, the researchers believe that an appropriate organizational climate is needed to facilitate the efforts of the Learning Organization.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE

Litwin and Stringer (1968, p.1) viewed organizational climate as "a set of measurable properties of the work environment, perceived directly or indirectly by people who live and work in this environment and assumed to influence their motivation and behavior". Organizational researchers have shown strong interest in the study of organizational climate partly due to its hypothesized relationship to other organizational phenomena such as commitment, leadership behaviors, job performance, job satisfaction, productivity, motivation and the quality of work group interaction (Stringer 2002; Laschinger, et al., 2001; Goleman, 2000; Schnake, 1983; Pritchard and Karasick, 1973; Friedlander and Greenberg, 1971). For example, Bhaesajsanguan (2010) explored the behavior of 840 Thai Technicians in the Telecommunication private sector and found that organizational climate goes hand in hand with job satisfaction. He also found that organizational climate is positively related to organizational commitment through job satisfaction. A study by Castro and Martins (2010) examined potential contributors toward the job satisfaction of 696 employees in a South African call center, and found that the indirect correlate of their satisfaction and work environment perception was the degree of supportiveness of the organizational climate in which they were placed. Also, Poon and Ainuddin (1990) examined the relationships between organizational climate and job satisfaction and performance using data from 462 employees of a large car manufacturing company in Malaysia. Results indicated significant relationships between several organizational climate dimensions and job satisfaction. However, only one of the climates was found to have an influence on perceived performance. On the other hand, Stringer (2002) concluded from research and consulting work that different organizational climates can arouse different kinds of motivation.

Although there are multiple organizational climate dimensions used by researchers (Denison, 1996), the main organizational climates that have been identified (see for example Stringer, 2002; Litwinand Stringer, 1968) are: Structure (sense of employees' being well organized and that their roles, and responsibilities are clearly defined), Responsibility (encouragement of individual judgment and discretion, employees' feeling of "being their own boss"), Risk (willingness to take chances on employees' ideas), Reward (basing positive rewards on performance and outweighing punishment in the organization), Warmth and Support (warmth in the relationships among employees supported by a relaxed and people-oriented atmosphere), Conflict (maintaining good interpersonal relations and avoiding open arguments and disagreements), Expect Approval (pride and loyalty toward the organization and work group).These climates will be used as the bases for our research.

## 1. Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the different organizational climates on Learning Organizations' various learning dimensions. This research will try to answer the following queries:

Q1:     Which Organization Climate affects a given Learning Organization dimension?

Q2:     Which Learning Organization dimension is mostly affected by a given Organization Climate?

Q3:     Which combination of the main Organizational Climates best suit a given Learning Organizational dimension?

## 2. Methodology

The study is conducted within Lebanese organizations. Data were gathered through questionnaires distributed randomly to employees working in small and medium size companies from different industries. Analysis of the data is based on seven climates and their relationship with Learning Organizations. Preliminary statistical analysis based on pilot study found several climates significantly related to different dimensions of the learning.

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# A SURVEY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES FOR BUSINESS CASE STUDIES

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## ABSTRACT

*The case study is a qualitative methodology that is frequently employed in business research, but often without the methodological thoroughness that other research methods receive because of a lack of formal protocol and the perceived obviousness of the results. With some researchers lamenting the restriction of case studies and other qualitative methods to sociological and phenomenological research, business research is increasingly looking to combine qualitative and quantitative methods for a more holistic approach to the organization. This paper will seek to uncover the ways that case studies can illuminate and obfuscate certain business research problems, and how this research method can be applied with more rigor in order to obtain the same level of validity and robustness as quantitative data receive in business research. .*

Keywords: *case study, qualitative methodology, business research, research methodology, combine qualitative and quantitative, holistic approach*

## INTRODUCTION

A case study is an intensive analysis of an individual unit (e.g., a person, group, or event) stressing developmental factors in relation to context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is a research approach, situated between concrete data taking techniques and methodological paradigms (Lamnek, 2005). The data drawn on for the study can comprise researcher observation and personal interviewing as well as sources from public and private archives. Leonard-Barton (1990) points out that "the phenomenon being researched always dictates to some extent the terms of its own dissection and exploration". This means that when applied to a business context, case study methodology will adapt to the type of sources and procedures that are available, just as the methodology has been adapted to different social science research. Yin (2008), writes that "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries". Tellis (1997) argues that the unit of analysis is a critical factor in the case study because rather than studying a group or individual, case study research tends to focus on the process or system of action. He writes that "case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined".  Yin (1994) argues that there are at least four roles for a case study model: to explain complex causal

links in real-life interventions; to describe the real-life context in which the intervention has occurred; to describe the intervention itself; and to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes.

Stake (1995) pointed out that the internal and external validity protocols that are used to promote accuracy in case studies and foster the developments of several explanations for phenomena are known as triangulation. Triangulation in case study research can result from a mixture of data, researchers, theories, and mixed methodological approaches, such as combined quantitative and qualitative research (Feagin et al, 1991; Yin, 1984). There are four types of triangulation identified by Denzin, (1984) for case study research: *data source triangulation* wherein the researcher attempts to identify data that remains the same in different contexts; *investigator triangulation* where different researchers investigate the same phenomenon; *theory triangulation* where different theoretical hypotheses are applied to the same data set; and *methodological triangulation* which seeks to reproduce similar results with different methodologies. The purpose of these triangulations is to demonstrate the robust nature of the results from the case study.

## STRENGTHS OF CASE STUDY RESEARCH

This section will investigate the literature on the strengths of the case study research methodology, both as a comprehensive research strategy, and specifically with regards to business research. Tellis (1997) points out, that case studies are multi-perspectival analyses where the researcher takes into consideration the interaction between groups within the organization, as well as individuals and groups effected by the organization, for instance, CEOs, employees, customers, regulators and other people involved in the organization. This is one of the strengths of the case study over sampling methods and quantitative methods which tend to favor the organization's 'elite' because they generate the data.

Single-case studies and multiple-case studies are both useful tools for business research. Single cases can be used to support or contest a model or theory, as well as to demonstrate an unusual or exemplary case (Yin, 1994). Single-case studies are strongest for exemplary situations where a researcher has gained access to a phenomenon that has been under-researched or even unknown. In business, this can be the creation and implementation of a new model, the opening up of a previously closed industry, or even the development of a new organization. Tellis (1997) points out that "these studies can be holistic or embedded the latter occurring when the same case study involves more than one unit of analysis." These seem to be particularly relevant in business research when examining a particular phenomenon, rather than a wider business issue.

Multiple-case studies are equally valuable, although they can be applied to a different type of business research question because they show repeatable phenomena. However, they have a weakness, as well, because they are conflated with the idea of sampling logic. While sample "case studies" frequently appear in business research literature, this type of sample selection is not a true case study because it does not take a holistic approach to each situation, but picks and chooses to fit an argument. The use of multiple-case studies helps to develop external validity and guard against researcher bias (Leonard-Barton, 1990). Yin (1984) suggests

that the reasoning for using a multiple-case study methodology is close to the scientific approach of using multiple experiments where each case should be chosen on the basis that it "either (a) predicts similar results (a literal replication), or (b) produces contrary results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)" Campbell (1975) argues that the case study method does not attempt to elicit freedom from a large standardized data set, but the case study tests "theory with degrees of freedom coming from the multiple implications of theory; the process is a kind of pattern-matching."

Another strength of the case study method in business is that any fact relevant to the process or the phenomenon is a potential source of data because of the ultimate role of context and situation (Franz & Robey, 1984). This relates back to the role of triangulation in the case study approach: in order to make sense of all the interrelated parts in an organization or a number of organizations the research methodology should "slice vertically through the organization, obtaining data from multiple levels and perspectives" (Leonard-Barton, 1990).

Finally, Yin (2008) points out that a great strength of the case study method is that, like a history, it examines events when "relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated" and therefore, like a history, it is able "to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations – beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study" In terms of business research, this once again favors the singular or exemplary phenomenon over the more generalizable wider business phenomenon.

## WEAKNESSES OF CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Many of the weaknesses of case study research methodology stem from the improper understanding of the methodology. Eisenhardt (1989) writes that there is a "lack of clarity about the process of actually building theory from cases, especially regarding the central inductive process and the role of literature". Case studies can also be misused in situations that call for a different research strategy. Yin (2008) points out that case studies are good for explanatory research questions that "deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence". However, a case study would be inappropriate for a 'how many' or 'how much' research question, where archival research or survey data would be more appropriate (Yin, 2008).

Flyvbjerg (2006) points out the following five common misunderstandings about case study research that illustrate the potential weaknesses of the method if ill-applied: theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge; one cannot generalize from a single case, therefore, the single-case study cannot contribute to scientific development; the case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building; the case study contains a bias toward verification; and it is often difficult to summarize specific case studies. While he goes on to debunk these assumptions by applying what Kitchenham, et al, (1995) refer to as a "well-understood theoretical basis" the misconceptions he cites often plague business research that uses a haphazard case study methodology.

Another important weakness in the practical application of case study methodology has been the effort by researchers to support internal validity, reliability, construct validity, and external validity (Yin, 1989). Some efforts have been made by researchers, as well as by case study proponents to articulate the process of validity. Yin (1994) argued for the use of multiple sources of evidence, such as archival, interviews, and external reports, as another way of creating construct validity. The case study research of Levy (1988) used a single-case exploratory method to establish his researcher's construct validity, and a single explanatory case for internal validity. External validity is generally created by triangulation in multiple-case studies, but is more elusive in a single-case study. External validity in single-case studies could be achieved from theoretical relationships – theoretical triangulation – and generalizing from these (Yin, 1994). As discussed earlier, triangulation is one way of overcoming the validity and robustness critiques of case study methodology. However, in practice, this is one aspect that is regularly overlooked in applications of the case study to business research.

The methodological fuzziness associated with case studies because of the lack of a formal case study protocol is a significant weakness both in terms of validity of results and reliability of the study in future research.

Another weakness is that in the interviewing and observing process, the high level of contact with subjects can create informal manipulation (Yin, 2008). There are other potential biases, including the researcher's possible misjudgment of the representativeness of a single event or process and thereby exaggerating the relevance of a data set because of its perceived importance in a particular case, or biasing estimates through unwitting anchoring (Jaikumar & Bohn, 1986; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). Biases are particularly important in business research because the researchers may have a connection with the organization being studied – particularly in graduate school research settings – and therefore may consciously or unconsciously influence the interpretation and presentation of the study.

Another critique of the case study method is the issue of generalization because the case study is usually relevant to a specific context and therefore not more widely applicable even though researchers try to draw comparisons. Single-case studies in particular are limited in terms of their generalizability (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). Yin (1984) attempted to refute this criticism of the case study method by arguing that there is a difference between analytic generalization and statistical generalization: He states that "in analytic generalization, previously developed theory is used as a template against which to compare the empirical results of the case study."

The fallacy of generalization assumes that a single case or even a few cases have been drawn from a larger group of similar cases; in these situations, the reference to a 'small sample' of cases arises, treating the single-case study as though it were a single respondent in a survey or sampling study. In other words, a common problem with the case study method is that it is not treated like a case study, but like a sample or other method that extracts a sample for wider understanding and generalization.

# CONCLUSIONS

With researchers lamenting the restriction of case studies and other qualitative methods to sociological and phenomenological research, business research has increasingly looked to create a more holistic approach to the organization through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. This literature review has sought to uncover the ways that case studies can illuminate and obfuscate certain business research problems. While the majority of case study theory has developed outside of the business research area, the methodological issues that occur in social research are important to understand when applying the methodology to business research because qualitative research methods deserve a rigor comparable to that generally reserved for quantitative methods.

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# COLLEGE STUDENT KNOWLEDGE OF THE BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examined the knowledge of college students about the Better Business Bureau (BBB). The overall knowledge of the BBB by students was low and less than that of the public at large. There were no differences of knowledge scores between male and female students. The knowledge scores of juniors/seniors were significantly higher than freshmen level students. An important issue facing the BBB is reaching the Millennial (18-29 years) age group with its message. One approach is the use of guest lecturers at community colleges and four-year universities and to reach out to college student leaders. Given the technology savvy of the Millennial person, the use of social networking should be considered. Time and money costs are obstacles to using social networking by Better Business Bureaus. They must be overcome.*

## INTRODUCTION

The BBB dates back to 1912 when Vigilance Committees of Advertising Clubs were established to correct abuses in advertising. The BBB's original function has expanded to monitor activities in the marketplace. The BBB provides many services for consumers and BBB members. A 2004 survey by the Princeton Survey Research Associates International showed that 89% of principal owners and top managers of member and non-member U.S. businesses say they have heard or read something about the BBB (Princeton, 2004). Even more telling is the finding that specific knowledge about the BBB and its activities is lower than might be expected. Only the most basic of BBB service areas are commonly known to business leaders overall, taking and processing consumer complaints (78%), and providing consumers with prepurchase information about companies (Princeton, 2004).

Despite the important role of BBB's in the U.S. economy, there have been few studies of them. Young (1994) found that 81% of BBB members surveyed used the BBB to check the reliability of unknown companies before doing business with them. Some 68% belong to the BBB because the BBB warned customers of scams (Young, 1994). The findings of a survey conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International found that seven in ten consumers indicated that knowing that a firm is a BBB Accredited business makes them more likely to do business with it (Princeton Survey Research, 2004). Last, Lacho and Mitchell (2010) describe how a BBB Accredited member small business owner can use the services of the Bureau to benefit the firm and contribute to its profitability.

The purpose of this study is to examine the knowledge of college business students about the Better Business Bureau. Specifically, we have speculated that there may be overall differences in their knowledge of the BBB between male and female students and between freshmen and juniors/seniors (see Research Questions 1 and 2 below). These students are the business leaders, small business owners and potential BBB members of the future. The literature shows no study of college students and the BBB. The results of this study should provide some guidelines as to how to promote to and work with today's college student.

*Research Question 1:* *There will be no differences in BBB knowledge scores between male and female students.*

*Research Question 2:* *There will be no differences in BBB knowledge scores between freshmen and juniors/seniors.*

## METHOD

Subjects in the sample were approximately 179 students from a four-year public university in the South. The students were roughly 112 from freshmen level class and 67 from junior/senior level class (Table 1). The students were roughly 47% female and 53% male with 64% in the 18-22 age group and 28% in the 23-27 group. Sixty-three percent of these students were working full-time or part-time. Some 61% of them were taking 4 or 5 courses and 30% were taking 6 or more courses. In this study, we measured the knowledge of college business students about the BBB with a series of 32 statements using a true/false scale. These statements include the BBB's governance and functions/services.

## RESULTS

Table 1 summarizes the statements about the BBB's governance, operations, and functions/services that received the lowest scores from students. The biggest misconception is "There is at least one BBB office in all 50 states." Only 9% of the students answered this correctly. The next is "There is no difference between being an accredited BBB business member and simply having a good rating" with 16.8% answering correctly. The statement "The New Orleans BBB provides excellent opportunities for person-to-person networking" has 17.3% answering correct. Thirty-three percent answered "The BBB accepts verbal complaints" correctly. "A company can ignore consumer complaints from the BBB" and "BBB board members are paid a fee to serve on a local BBB board" have roughly 43% answered correctly. "Not all businesses can belong to the BBB" and "The BBB is a local government agency" have 44% and 47.5% respectively being answered correctly. Table 1 lists another eight statements which have correct percentages from 50% to 60%. Since a true/false scale is used in this study, there will be a 50% chance of guessing correctly and therefore the statements below 60% should also be looked at closely. These statements are:

- ➤ BBB accredited businesses are guaranteed a higher grade than non-accredited businesses.
- ➤ Sally Hunter is looking for an air conditioning service. She contacts the BBB. The BBB will recommend an air conditioning service to her.
- ➤ The BBB has the authority to impose fines or put companies out of business.
- ➤ The BBB is a credit reporting agency.
- ➤ The BBB is a for profit business organization.
- ➤ "Angie's List" has local offices to serve their customers.
- ➤ The BBB helps collect past due accounts.
- ➤ BBB's report on charities (local and national).

Overall, the juniors and seniors have a higher correct percentage than freshmen on 12 out of the 18 items listed in Table 1. This seems to indicate that as students take more and more business classes, they may become more knowledgeable about the business environment, including the BBB.

Our first research question considered the possibility that male and female students may have different levels of BBB knowledge. An ANOVA was used to test if the overall scores are different between male and female students. The ANOVA result is not significant. This implies that male and female students seem to have roughly the same level of knowledge of the BBB. On average, male students scored 19.45 (61%) out of 32 questions correctly and female students scored 18.78 (59%) out of 32 correctly.

Our second research question examined whether there would be a difference in BBB knowledge between freshmen and juniors/seniors. An ANOVA was used and the result is significant. On the average, the juniors/seniors have significantly higher scores (20.45 which is 64%) than freshmen (18.23 which is 57%). This finding is consistent with the results in Table 1. Not only juniors/seniors scored higher on the misconceptions of the BBB (Table 1), they just scored higher in general.

## DISCUSSION

The Princeton Study (2004) provides a picture of the public's knowledge of the BBB. Highlights show that the majority of Americans know about the core services that the BBB provides. On the other hand, some 74% of the American public cannot identify what type of organization the BBB is. Some 27% believe the BBB is a government agency. Little more than one- half of young adults under the age of 30 (55%) identify the BBB as a government agency.

The findings of this study suggest that student respondents have less knowledge of the BBB than the public at large. What is disturbing in this study is that a large percentage of students had misconceptions about some basic aspects of the BBB. These include the perception that the BBB is a local government agency, it is a for profit organization, it will recommend a business in response to an inquiry, and there is no difference between being an accredited BBB member and simply having a good rating. An important issue today facing the BBB is how to get its message across to young people 18-29 years of age, also known as the Millennials.
Reaching the Millennials

The Millennials represent the new face of the United States (Keeter & Taylor, 2009). They are most familiar with digital technology and social media. Many have their own Facebook page. They far outdistance prior generations in the use of cell phones to text, create a personal social networking profile and to have a wireless internet away from home (Keeter and Taylor, 2009).

One approach to reaching Millennial students is old-fashioned selling by having BBB representatives give guest lecturers in classes at community colleges and four-year universities. A variation of this approach is to invite student campus leaders to the BBB office or luncheon events. A BBB booth could be set up at campus career day. Promotion could be carried out by advertising in the school newspaper or if the school has one, the campus radio station. Advertising may be purchased in local media using those which target the 18-29 age group. In addition, advertising may be purchased on Facebook. The BBB would pay by the number of clicks. Another means is to announce the Facebook page on the BBB website.

The BBB has to have a well-done website for the Millennial to use as well as a Facebook page. Social networking via a Facebook page and Twitter are free, however, there are time and personnel costs. A social-media expert may be needed to be put on staff, although this person may be used to maintain the BBB website as well.

A BBB may not have the funds to have a full-time person to keep and update a Facebook account. On the other hand, this administrative cost may be necessary given the Millennial person of today and the future. The BBB has already taken a step into the age of Star Trek. BBBs reports are now formatted to fit individual smart phones.

This study suggests areas for future research about college student knowledge of the BBB. Research could be expanded to other colleges, e.g., large, small, private, and rural. Student knowledge of the BBB can be examined by age, race, parental education and occupation, and urban versus rural areas. The use of social media by BBBs should be studied in different Better Business Bureau markets, e.g., by population size, size of BBB membership, urban versus rural, and geographical area of the United States. Of those BBBs using Facebook, what have been their successes obstacles?

## CONCLUSION

The knowledge of the BBB by college students is weak. The level of education stages shows that students further along in their college studies have a better knowledge of the BBB. This college age group (18-29) needs to be made aware of the nature of the BBB. A major way of reaching this group is by staff member lectures to classes and special events for campus leaders. More importantly, given the technological savvy of this age group BBB chapters need to get into social networking.

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# SOCIAL MEDIA AND SUCCESS FACTORS

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## ABSTRACT

*Social media is gaining importance in marketing communications. Companies are encouraged to use social media for many activities including advertising campaigns, distributing coupons and sponsorship activities. What consumers are thinking about social media and the organizational presence in their virtual space? This research is focused on gaining understanding about these topics. One-on-one qualitative interviews provided in-depth explanation on how consumers perceive social media and what they suggested companies to do in such media. Core values for individuals were found as community, mobility, efficiency and popularity. Core values for companies, on the other hand, were advertising and effectiveness. Social media locations were considered as companies' personal sides rather than their corporate face. Users suggested organizations to communicate their socially responsible deeds on a regular basis in the social media.*