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## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

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The articles contained in this volume have been double blind refereed. The acceptance rate for manuscripts in this issue, 25%, conforms to our editorial policies.

We intend to foster a supportive, mentoring effort on the part of the referees which will result in encouraging and supporting writers. We welcome different viewpoints because in differences we find learning; in differences we develop understanding; in differences we gain knowledge; and, in differences we develop the discipline into a more comprehensive, less esoteric, and dynamic metier.

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# LIAR! LIAR! YOUR PANTS ARE ON FIRE: DECEPTIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

**Julie Indvik, California State University, Chico**  
**Pamela R. Johnson, California State University, Chico**

## ABSTRACT

*We live with lies in the workplace every day. From everyday paperclips to the billions in corporate accounts and from the hollow commitments made to new recruits to the increasingly wistful search for the relationship between performance and reward, work is a showcase for human duplicity. And, anyone under enough pressure, or given enough incentive, will lie. Lies, for the most part, are more prevalent in the business world than at home because the work environment is viewed more impersonally. In the workplace, where high performance is everything, lies are told to put a better light on a situation or a result, to justify an action, to be reassuring, or for our own protection. And the cost of dishonesty ranges from \$6 billion to as much as \$200 billion annually in the United States. This paper will give a definition of lying, discuss who lies and the reasons why people lie, describe if people can actually detect lies, discuss the costs of lying in business, and describe what managers can do to help their organizations.*

## INTRODUCTION

*“A lie would have no sense unless the truth was felt as dangerous.”*

Alfred Adler

Several centuries before the era of suspicion and performance indicators, the French philosopher Blaise Pascal noted that “mutual cheating is the foundation of society.” Today, anyone who works knows what he means. From everyday paperclips to the billions in corporate accounts; and from the hollow commitments made to new recruits, to the increasingly wistful search for the relationship between performance and reward, work is a showcase for human duplicity (Overell, 2003). Deception is a pervasive element of daily working life. Sometimes it is an official part of one’s work. Workplace cultures socialize individuals into using deception as a tool in performing their everyday work (Shulman, 2006). We live with lies in the workplace every day. There are the lies we use to ease out of an uncomfortable situation. “I have to leave now, got to pick up the kids at day care.” “My boss insists we rotate suppliers, so we won’t be doing business with you this

year.” “No, that stain on your tie isn’t noticeable.” Often we don’t refer to these statements as lies, but as fibs, which sounds gentler and less deceptive. After awhile, however, we have trouble distinguishing between reality and the embroidered information we have put out to the world (Penson, 1997). This paper will give a definition of lying, discuss who lies and the reasons why people lie, describe if people can actually detect lies, discuss the costs of lying in business, and describe what managers can do to help their organizations.

## **BACKGROUND**

*“Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive.”*

Sir Walter Scott

In English medieval courts truth was tested by ordeals of fire and water, on the basis a truthful person would be protected by God. Someone suspected of lying would have to carry a red-hot iron bar for nine paces. Alternatively, s/he could opt to walk across nine red-hot ploughshares. Either way, if the suspect was burned, then this was proof that s/he was lying and so could be promptly hanged. Other courts went in for trial by water. In the ultimate “no-win” situation, the person accused of lying was put into a sack and thrown into a pond. If the accused sank, this showed s/he was innocent, but s/he might drown anyway. If s/he floated, this was taken as proof that s/he was lying and s/he would be hanged (A Brief History, 2002).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a “new science” called phrenology entailed measuring “bumps” on a person’s skull. Supposedly, it led to the idea that lies could be detected by looking at physical symptoms. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the search for “scientific” ways of spotting liars moved from bumps on the head to brain chemistry, with the search for a “truth serum” drug. In 1963, The US Supreme Court said “serum-induced confession” was in effect a form of torture and the practice was ruled unconstitutional. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, makers of the latest lie detector machine which measures supposedly tell-tale changes in temperature around the eye sockets when somebody is telling a deliberate untruth claim a success rate of 83% in detecting liars. Whether it will prove any more reliable than a conventional polygraph which relies on sensors to detect breathing rate, pulse, blood pressure and perspiration, remains open to question (A Brief History, 2002).

Whether it is being told that the person you want to speak to is “in a meeting” or large scale fraud resulting in the collapse of an entire organization, failing to tell the truth is an aspect of the business world you ignore at your peril (Michalczyk, 1999).

## **DEFINITION OF LYING**

“Half the truth is often a great lie.”

Benjamin Franklin

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Lying is “any intentional deceptive message in the form of a statement” (Minkler & Miceli, 2004). An “official” lie actually misleads, deliberately conveying a false impression. So complimenting a friend’s awful haircut or telling a creditor that the check is in the mail both qualify. Although we are socialized from the time we can speak to believe that it is always better to tell the truth, in reality, society often encourages and even rewards deception. Show up late for an early morning meeting at work, and it is best not to admit that you overslept. You are punished far more than you would be if you lie and say you were stuck in traffic. Moreover, lying is integral to many occupations. Think how often we see lawyers constructing farfetched theories on behalf of their clients or reporters misrepresenting themselves in order to gain access to good stories (Kornet, 1997). Lies are typically motivated by a desire to persuade others to act or to refrain from acting in a certain manner, or to make decisions in one’s favor. Sex, money, status, power, love, anything desired can provide temptation to kill, steal or lie. But lies can be motivated by nothing other than the creation of a false (misleadingly favorable or unfavorable) image or the fabrication of an entertaining story (Best, 2007).

### WHO LIES?

*“A liar should have a good memory.”*

Quintilian

Anyone under enough pressure, or given enough incentive, will lie. Frequent liars tend to be manipulative and Machiavellian not to mention overly concerned with the impression they make on others. Also, liars not always fit the stereotype of caring only about themselves. Research reveals that extroverted, sociable people are slightly more likely to lie and that some personality and physical traits, notably self-confidence and physical attractiveness have been linked to an individual’s skill at lying when under pressure (Kornet, 1997). Lying has long been a part of everyday life. Most people lie once or twice a day, almost as often as they snack from the refrigerator or brush their teeth. Both men and women lie in approximately a fifth of their social exchanges lasting 10 or more minutes. Over the course of a week, they deceive about 30 percent of those with whom they interact one-on-one (Kornet, 1997).

Everyday lies are really part of the fabric of social life. A recent study showed that lying was more common in phone calls than in face-to-face chats. In addition, one lie in seven was discovered as far as the liars could tell. Also, a tenth of the lies were merely exaggeration, while 60 percent were outright deceptions. Most of the rest were subtle lies, often of omission. And finally, more than 70 percent of the liars said they would tell their lies again (The Real Truth, 1996).

The truth about lying is that we all do it much more than most of us care to admit. We nearly always deny lying because we are scared of being viewed as pathological liars and hence never being believed again (Bagaric, 2007) A recent survey of 2050 employees investigated the issue of lying in the workplace. The CareerBuilder survey indicated that 19% of workers admit they lied at

the office at least once a week (Miller, 2007). According to another study, people on average tell three lies for every 15 minutes of conversation (Bartolini, 2004). A study by Cyberslotz.co.uk found UK workers told more than 1.4 billion lies to their bosses in 2004, with more than two-thirds or 68% admitting to lying at least once a week (Workers Told, 2005).

Another survey found a nation of inventive cheats. There was the marketing manager who bought his wedding shoes on a company credit card; the office manager who sold a laptop computer he left out of a company audit; and the business consultant who extended a work-related stay at London's Savoy Hotel. In addition, a large majority of workers confessed they had taken stationery home or embellished their resumes (Overell, 2003)

Everyday examples of lying in the workplace include embellishing the truth on personal resumes and company track records; suggesting to customers that a product is better than it actually is; and promising bonuses, that never seem to arrive, to team members. Embellishing on a resume or company track record might not seem like a big deal until you realize how many people who rose to the top by this method also came crashing down when their lies were detected or it was discovered they could not actually do what they said they could (Wang & Kleiner, 2005). In fact, in several recent studies, the rate of lying on resumes or in job interviews was calculated to be 20 to 44 percent. That includes lies about past degrees, jobs, and responsibilities. For too many candidates, the desire to get ahead at all costs is more important than honesty. To help job seekers fabricate impressive backgrounds, a \$200 million industry has grown up to provide diplomas for any degree anywhere. A quick Google search on "purchase a fake diploma" yields more than 31,500 listings (Lying, 2007).

With the exception of politicians, perhaps no one fibs as beautifully as Alibi Network, a three-year-old service that provides elaborately constructed excuses for its clients. Whether you are looking to skip a day of work or to secretly leave town for the weekend, Alibi Network can provide fake airline receipts or phone calls to your boss explaining your absence and even mock up an entire itinerary for a bogus conference you were "attending." Rarely has lying been so creepily airtight. The Chicago-based company charges from \$75 for a simple phone call to thousands of dollars for extensive lying, on top of a \$75 annual fee. The most popular service is the "virtual hotel," in which the fibber can provide a boss or family member with the phone number of a hotel where he is supposed to be. After the telephone call is placed, one of Alibi's actors will answer the call as if a particular hotel has been reached. The incoming call then can be forwarded to the fibber's cellphone, making it seem as if he is in a certain city even though he is not. Although the pronoun "he" is used, half of Alibi's members are female (Tucker, 2007).

### **REASONS FOR LYING**

*"Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies."*

Oliver Goldsmith

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Lies are more prevalent in the business world than at home because the work environment is viewed more impersonally. In the workplace, where high performance is everything, lies are told to put a better light on a situation or a result, to justify an action, to be reassuring, or for our own protection. Because it is not uncommon to see lies rewarded in business, it can be difficult to convince ourselves and others that lying should be obliterated (Penson, 1991).

Another very common reason employees lie at work has to do with appeasing customers; this is the motivation for lying in 26 percent of all cases. Covering up for failed projects and mistakes is the second most common reason for lying at work, making up 13 percent of all the lies told. Eight percent of the lies at work are done in order to explain tardiness and absence. Another 8 percent are lies told to cover up for another employee, whereas 5 percent are lies told with the intention of getting other employees in trouble or to look better than other employees in front of management. The most common reason for lying at work is to change the subject or avoid a topic. This includes denying knowledge of an event or situation, saying that a call will be returned, claiming that another call is coming through, or even that they were not present when certain information was sent out (Why Lying Exists, 2007).

Other common reasons that people lie include:

- ◆ Fear – people are trying to avoid punishment for something they have done or perceived they have done.
- ◆ Habitual fear – in this case people are in constant fear of being punished and it becomes a reflex or habit. In this case they insist the lie is the truth. This is called compulsive lying.
- ◆ Modeling – someone sees another person lying and getting away with it, and s/he becomes more prone to lying.
- ◆ Reward – in this case the truth won't get you what you want, so you use a lie to get the reward or goal (Miller, 2007).

There are short and long-term effects of making excuses at work. Poorly offered excuses, such as blaming others or telling half-truths, are not believable and cast doubt on a person's character. Giving excuses too often undermines a person's reputation by making him/her seem self-absorbed, unreliable or unknowledgeable (Sciranka, 2001).

Deception occurs frequently in everyday workplace communications, so managers and employees should be on their guard (How to Tackle, 2007).

### **DETECTING LIES**

*“Some people can't tell a lie; others can't tell the truth, and unfortunately most people can't tell the difference.”*

Most of us are not very good at spotting if someone is lying. Even people whose job it is to detect deception like police officers, FBI agents, and judges perform, on average, little better than if they had taken a guess. In a review of 253 studies, the overall accuracy hovers around 53 percent. That is hardly better than flipping a coin (Persaud, 2005). One of the biggest myths about body language is the belief that eye contact, or lack of it, exposes a liar. Even when presented with evidence to the contrary, many of us still suspect that liars out themselves by averting their eyes. It is very hard to surrender the belief that eye contact is a test of character. Far more reliable than eye contact is tone of voice. With the exception of sociopaths, who are expert liars, most people sound tense, their voices highly pitched, when they fib (Lawson, 2006).

By studying large groups of participants, researchers have identified certain general behaviors that liars are more likely to exhibit than are people telling the truth. Liars tend to move their arms, hands, and fingers less and blink less than people telling the truth do. The extra effort needed to remember what they have already said and to keep their stories consistent may cause liars to restrain their movements and fill their speech with pauses. People shading the truth tend to make fewer speech errors than truth tellers do, and they rarely backtrack to fill in forgotten or incorrect details (Lock, 2004). And finally, researchers in the medical sciences claim to have identified a “Pinocchio effect,” that is, an involuntary engorging of nasal tissues whenever one tells a lie (Litz, 2003). Yet, people don’t seem to be very good at spotting deception signals. Human accuracy is really just barely better than chance (Lock, 2004).

With regard to lie detection, there is a new computer program called “The Silent Talker.” This program, developed by the University of Manchester, uses a camera and artificial intelligence to process patterns of nonverbal behavior. In a pilot study, Silent Talker correctly classified 80% of responses as true or false. With the Silent Talker, there is no biased and irrational human subjectivity, so the system is more likely able to extract the true emotion, personality, behavior, or medical state to offer results that are better, fairer and truer (Cristol, 2003).

### **COSTS OF LYING**

*“The liar’s punishment is not in the least that he is not believed, but that he cannot believe anyone else.”*

George Bernard Shaw

Undetected lies of prospective or current employees cost business billions of dollars a year. The ability to detect these lies would be of immense benefit. In fact, the costs of applicant dishonesty and employee misconduct are difficult to calculate yet estimates range from \$6 billion to as much as \$200 billion annually in the United States (Walczyk, et. al., 2005). In addition, credibility is a form of wealth. Everyone has access to some credibility. If credibility is squandered, believers are less readily available. And if one wishes to be believed when speaking the truth, one

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must have credibility. Lying about one matter makes it easier to lie about others. Lies often require more lies to shore up the false impressions. The costs of lying are, indeed, high (Best, 2007).

Being a liar has other costs. People won't trust you, you can't remember the lies; you need to justify them. Since humans lie with some frequency, it is relevant to consider the costs of lies on the liars and on others. We don't trust people who lie to us. The victims of liars exact revenge, even if it costs the victims. When negotiating over money, for example, people give better deals, in repeated interactions to people who have been honest, and the worst deals to those who have directly lied. Tarnishing a long-term relationship has a particularly high cost for business operations that rely on repeated interactions (Grover, 2005).

### WHAT CAN MANAGERS DO TO HELP?

*"It is hard to tell if a man is telling the truth when you know you would lie if you were in his place."*

H. L. Mencken

How can managers get workers to cut down on their lies? First, employers need to take some of the blame for workplace lies. People do not like lying, so much so that it produces physiological changes in their bodies. Employers need to ensure they create an environment that recognizes and accepts unchangeable aspects of the human condition. People are not machines. We all have lapses in motivation and attention to detail and, accordingly, we make mistakes. At other times, we just want to take time out for a day or so to attend to personal matters. Employers who run the mantra that work is No. 1 and that nothing short of perfection is acceptable set themselves up for being fed a litany of lies. It is in such an environment that people hide mistakes and take time out without forewarning (Bagaric, 2007). The lessons learned from research on lying in organizations suggest the following:

- ◆ Lying is difficult to detect on the interpersonal level.
- ◆ Lying is partly caused by structural constraints and conflict.
- ◆ Lying is partly caused by individual differences.
- ◆ Lying is partly caused by reward structures (Grover, 2005).

Eighty-five percent of managers say they will not promote someone who is caught lying. Being deceitful can impact a career, and bosses and coworkers can easily begin to distrust you. Honesty is still the best policy.

### CONCLUSION

*"The lie is a condition of life."*

Friedrich Nietzsche

Current stories of inflated reports of corporate assets, outright lies by the federal government, sexual abuse by priests, along with continuing lies in other spheres of social life, raise the questions about the short-term and long-term consequences of deception. Certainly, anyone who insists on condemning all lies should ponder what would happen if we could reliably tell when our family, friends, colleagues, and government leaders were deceiving us. It is tempting to think that the world would become a better place when purged of the deceptions that seem to interfere with our attempts at genuine communication or intimacy. Yet, perhaps our social lives would collapse under the weight of relentless honesty, with unveiled truths destroying our ability to connect with others. The ubiquity of lying is clearly a problem, but would we really want to will away all of our lies?

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# THE INFLUENCE OF TRAINING, SAFETY AUDITS, AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION ON SAFETY MANAGEMENT

**Tantatape Brahmasrene, Purdue University North Central**  
**Sarah Sanders Smith, Purdue University North Central**

## ABSTRACT

*This study examined crucial factors affecting industrial safety indicators. A survey was conducted to explore factors affecting total recordable incident rates and lost time incident rates. The number of safety audits and the natural log of safety infraction disciplinary action had a negative impact on the natural log of recordable incidents and the lost time incident rates while the number of training hours was an insignificant factor. Thus, the finding regarding training is contradictory to a belief that the number of training hours is an important factor in reducing recordable incident and lost time incident rates. These results should assist companies as they strive to focus on significant factors such as safety audits and disciplinary action in order to improve recordable incident and lost time incident rates, thus improving the safety performance of the organization.*

## INTRODUCTION

A safe workplace environment can improve labor productivity, reduce insurance premiums, and enhance the company's ability to compete in a global market. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics-IIF (2006) provides data on workplace recordable injuries and fatalities via the Injuries, Illnesses, and Fatalities program. In 2006, fatalities in the U.S. totaled 5,703. Private sector cases accounted for 5,202 of these fatalities. Total recordable incidents tallied 4,085,400. Of these cases, 1,183,500 involved lost workdays. Workplace injuries and illnesses are costly in financial and human terms.

Safety professionals and supervisors experience frustration over the perceived conflict that exists in the organization between spending time on safety training and meeting production requirements. To fulfill required safety training requirements and to conduct safety audits, the organization in part or in total ceases production. Thus, there exists an opportunity cost to safety compliance and injury prevention. To achieve and attempt to sustain a competitive edge in today's global market, safety training (a cost of goods sold) falls under scrutiny.

This research specifically sought to answer whether safety audits, training hours, and disciplinary actions for safety infractions had a significant impact on the Total Recordable Incident Rate (TRIR) and Lost Time Incident Rate (LTIR). Identifying key factors that affect these rates enables organizations to enhance their safety management and to optimize the allocation of organizational resources.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

According to Hurn (2007), a challenge remains for the organization in the area of safety management as even one fatality is too high. In recent years, many safety practitioners have adhered to a concept that the safety culture of an organization and its safety metrics are influenced by behavioral based safety. In practice, the behavioral theory of accident causation and prevention has both proponents and critics (Goetsch, 2002). Agraz-Boeneker, Groves, and Haight (2008) concluded that no relationship had been found between observations of the behavioral based safety program and incidence occurrence.

A data-based evaluation of the relationship between occupational safety and operating performance (Veltri, Pagell, Behm & Das, 2007) confirmed that performance in safety can have a positive influence on the firms' overall performance. The results support anecdotal evidence that safety is good business. Therefore, the following sections of this paper will investigate determinants of safety indicators. Relevant literature is presented below.

The total number of injuries cannot be used alone as a safety metric as this does not account for size of business. Both the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and Bureau of Labor Statistics use TRIR and LTIR rather than numerical totals. Major corporations, such as BP Amoco, require contractors to have a TRIR of less than 2.0 in order to perform work for them (British Petroleum, 2008). Low TRIR results indicate safety management has successfully held serious incidents to a minimum. On the other hand, LTIR recognizes the absenteeism attributed to workplace injuries and illnesses. Illness in this regard means occupational illness due to workplace exposures. The TRIR and LTIR are reported in annual reports of companies across the globe as indicators to shareholders of organizational safety. Goetsch (2002) shows how these indicators are derived.

(1)  $TRIR = N \times 200,000/T$ , where:

N = the total annual number of incidents (work-related injuries, illnesses, and fatalities) that required more than first aid and were listed on the company's OSHA 300 log, and

T = the total hours worked by all employees.

- 
- (2)  $LTIR = N \times 200,000/T$ , where:  
N = lost time incidents when employees must be off of work for treatment and recuperation,  
and T = the total hours worked by all employees.

### **Safety audits**

The Hartford Loss Control Department (1998) indicated that an effective safety audit is a tool that can be used by management to uncover safety and health problems before losses occur. In order to be effective, the audit must be supported by senior management. Audits should be continuous and aligned with the day-to-day operations of an organization. An ongoing audit process is a mechanism by which management can obtain measurable and meaningful data about the organization's safety and health programs. In contrast, a single audit is ineffective in that it only provides a snapshot of the overall status of safety and health programs. This link was established between aviation safety and human factors when the Line Operations Safety Audit of the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration was introduced in 1999 as the first safety audit program to derive all of its information from daily operations (Maurino, 2002).

### **Training hours**

In the past, justification for safety training was not needed because most of the training that was conducted was required by law (Petersen, 1996). Safety training was a necessary burden a company must bear. According to Hart, Newmann, and Veltri (2008), rather than a burden, safety training is now viewed not only as the proper way to conduct business, but also as a method to enhance business. Goetsch (2002) stated one of the best ways to promote safety in the workplace is to provide all employees with ongoing safety training. Initial training should be part of employee orientation and subsequent training should develop new, more specific, and more in-depth knowledge. In contrast, a study conducted by the American Transportation Research Institute in 2008 found no correlation between training duration and safety performance utilizing a logistic regression model. The findings indicate the need for further research on training hours and safety. *Safety infractions and disciplinary action.* According to Johnson (2004), safety professionals still agree with the federal OSHA's voluntary guidelines for safety adherence. These guidelines stated that a clearly communicated disciplinary system is an indispensable piece of a whole approach to safety and health protection. However, organizations may be reluctant to doll out discipline for safety infractions. Legal and image issues persist, as well as the existence of some safety professionals who now believe in positive strokes rather than punitive discipline.

## HYPOTHESIS

Based on the above discussion, it seems plausible to expect a relationship that industrial safety indicators such as Total Recordable Incident Rate (TRIR) and Lost Time Incident Rate (LTIR) are affected by the number of safety audits conducted in a year, number of training hours provided by the company and the disciplinary action against an employee's safety infraction. Furthermore, the number of safety audits, training hours, and safety infraction disciplinary actions are expected to have a negative impact on both safety indicators. This means an increase in the number of safety audits, training hours, and safety infraction disciplinary actions reduces the total recordable incident rates and lost time injury rates, and vice versa.

For empirical analysis, the models have been constructed as shown below:

$$\text{Model 1: } \text{TRIR} = \text{CONSTANT} + b_1 \text{SAFEAUDI} + b_2 \text{TRNGHRS} + b_3 \text{SAFDISP1} \\ + b_4 \text{SAFDISP2} + b_5 \text{SAFDISP3} + u_i$$

$$\text{Model 2: } \text{LTIR} = \text{CONSTANT} + b_1 \text{SAFEAUDI} + b_2 \text{TRNGHRS} + b_3 \text{SAFDISP1} \\ + b_4 \text{SAFDISP2} + b_5 \text{SAFDISP3} + u_i$$

Description of the variables is summarized in Table 1.  $u_i$  is a stochastic error term or disturbance term.

Table 1:1 Description of Variables	
Dependent variables	
TRIR	Total Recordable Incident Rate
LTIR	Lost Time Incident Rate
Independent variables	
SAFEAUDIT	Number of safety audits conducted in a year 1 = 0 2 = 1-5 3 = 6-10 4 = 11-15 5 = 16-20 6 = 21 or more
TRNGHRS	Number of training hours provided by the company
SAFDISP1 SAFDISP2 SAFDISP3	The first, second and third disciplinary action companies took against an employee when they committed a safety infraction. 0 = Do nothing 1 = Verbal warning 2 = Written warning 3 = Time off 4 = Termination

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## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

According to Frazee, Hardin, Brashears, Smith & Lockaby (2002), researchers should be encouraged to incorporate computer technology into their surveys. Data was obtained from a survey conducted in late 2007 utilizing an online survey tool, QuestionPro™. The survey was completed by safety professionals across the United States through national and regional websites of the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE). In addition, the survey was also distributed to companies listed on ISNetworld's national database where contractors store safety program information. The respondents in this sample emanated from nearly all states representing major industry groups such as construction, energy, manufacturing, scientific professional and petroleum refining. Because respondents were widely dispersed, no geographical bias is expected. The survey completion rate was about 38 percent or 309 out of 814 contacts.

Researchers have determined that, while there were no significant differences in reliability of responses, there were significant differences in response rates based on mode of collection. Traditional paper surveys yielded the high response rate at 60 percent with a significant drop to the web surveys at 43 percent, along with another significant decline to the e-mail surveys at 27 percent (Frazee, Hardin, Brashears, Smith & Lockaby, 2002). Furthermore, Zoomerang (2008), A MarketTools Inc. Company, provides a chart of 10,000 sample size requiring 370 responses for a 95 percent confidence level. Based on this fact and with a sample size substantially less than 10,000 potential respondents, the 309 responses in this study are sufficient.

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics of the Total Recordable Incident Rate (TRIR), Lost Time Incident Rate (LTIR), and training hours. These are scale variables where differences between values are comparable. The table shows a mean TRIR of 1.3. For comparison, the Bureau of Labor Statistics Table Q1 (2006) reported total incident rate of 5.9 for the construction industry while large petroleum and petroleum products wholesalers averaged 2.7. The LTIR mean is relatively low at 0.43. The maximum annual training hours reported was 670 with an overall average of about 50 hours. Potential huge outliers that may cause problems in the regression model are detected. For example, t-values are calculated for training hours. Histogram chart, skewness and kurtosis statistics are obtained. There are only three omitted outliers out of 14 expected candidates based on the five percent confidence level and standard deviation greater than or equal to plus or minus five.

The number of safety audits and safety infraction disciplinary action are continuous ratio variables which make them ordinal variables with natural order (see descriptions in Table 1). Their frequencies are reported in Table 3. When asked how many safety audits were conducted in a year, 37.08 percent or 109 out of 294 valid cases indicated 21 or more. Regarding disciplinary action for safety infractions, 55.83 percent or 158 out of 283 manufacturers terminated employment after an employee committed the third safety infraction.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
TRIR	297	0	13	1.30	2.414
LTIR	275	0	14	.43	1.262
TRNGHRS	276	0	670	49.83	71.125

	SAFEAUDIT		SAFDISP1		SAFDISP2	SAFDISP3
Valid	1	17	.00	4	2	2
	2	105	1.00	220	15	3
	3	24	2.00	66	202	23
	4	29	3.00	1	56	97
	5	10	4.00	2	12	158
	6	109				
	Total	294	Total	293	287	283
Missing	System	15	System	16	22	26
Total		309		309	309	309
Notes	Variables in this frequency table are ordinal variables with natural order. See description in Table 1.					

The Ordinary Least Square (OLS) method was employed to test the above hypotheses. One of the tasks in performing regression analysis with several independent variables was to calculate a correlation matrix for all variables. There were no particularly large intercorrelations among independent variables. However, a measure of multicollinearity among independent variables would be performed.

### **EMPIRICAL RESULTS**

The assumption of linear multiple regression and the fitness of the model was tested. According to the computed values of a multiple regression model, the null hypothesis was rejected at a significant level of less than 0.01 (F test) in Total Recordable Incident Rate model (TRIR). This means that there existed a relationship between TRIR and the explanatory variables; the number of safety audits, training hours and safety infraction disciplinary actions. The coefficient of multiple determination (R Square) in Table 4 was relatively low. Note that R Square is a measure of goodness of fit. R Square of zero does not mean that there is no association among the variables (Norusis, 1993). It simply indicates no linear relationship. The logarithmic transformation is useful

to linearize the regression relation (Neter & Wasserman, 1974). Therefore, variables were transformed into natural logarithm which improves the value of the R Square. Training hours and the first two safety infraction disciplinary actions had no significant influence on both industrial safety models. As a result, they were omitted from the logarithmic models. The final results are shown in Table 5. The value of the R Square is improved when recordable incidents (dependent variables) and the third safety discipline were transformed into natural logarithm. For example, the R Square of TRIR model increases 200 percent from 0.04 to 0.12. Other similar published articles that show low R Squares are from Brahmairene and Smith (2008) at 0.1, and Lampert (2007) at 0.05. The F test shows significant level of less than 0.01 in all models. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is also presented to detect multicollinearity among independent variables. A value of VIF less than 10 generally indicates no presence of multicollinearity. It appears that the observed dependencies did not affect their coefficients.

Furthermore, the significant test (t-test) for both industrial safety models in Table 5 indicated that the number of safety audits was significant ( $\alpha < 0.05$ ) for the natural log of total recordable incident rates (LNTRIR) and on lost time injury rates (LNLTRIR), all with expected negative signs. The natural log of the third safety infraction disciplinary action (LNSAFDISP3) had a highly significant t-value ( $\alpha < 0.01$ ) on LNTRIR and significant at  $\alpha < 0.05$  on LNLTRIR, all with expected negative signs.

Coefficients	TRIR	VIF
CONSTANT	2.411*** (.746)	
SAFEAUDIT	.185** (.080)	1.061
TRNGHRS	-.001 (.002)	1.036
SAFDISP1	-.119 (.358)	1.467
SAFDISP2	-.084 (.360)	2.198
SAFDISP3	-.431* (.248)	1.620
R Square	0.04	
F Statistics	2.12*	

Note: t statistics are in parentheses.  
 Significant level : \* 0.10, \*\* 0.05, \*\*\*0.01  
 VIF = Variance inflation factor, a measure of collinearity

**Table 5: Safety Model Coefficients**

Coefficients	LNTRIR	VIF	LNLTIR	VIF
CONSTANT	2.388*** (.551)		1.999*** (2.645)	
SAFEAUDIT	-.110** (.050)	1.012	-.163** (-2.165)	1.004
LNSAFDISP3	-1.101*** (.417)	1.012	-1.227** (-2.163)	1.004
R Square	0.12		0.12	
F Statistics	5.37***		5.003***	

Notes: t statistics are in parentheses.

Significant level : \* 0.10, \*\* 0.05, \*\*\*0.01

VIF = Variance inflation factor, a measure of collinearity

## DISCUSSION

The variable training hours (TRNGHRS) proved to be in conflict with a common industry perception that if an organization invests in training, they should experience organizational benefits (McCardle, 1999). In this application, safety training should have reduced the recordable incident rate. Many Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) standards require annual training in the industrial environment. Thus, to meet regulatory requirements, a facility schedules a significant amount of safety training that is based on compliance, not on business justification or needs assessment. This precipitates the reaction of organizations to train, for training sake and diminishes optimal resource allocation (investment in training).

Safety audits (SAFEAUDIT), are encouraged by insurance companies, risk management groups and the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA). Audits are significant with respect to a reduction in recordable incidents. This means that an increase in the number of safety audits has a propensity to reduce total recordable incident rates and lost time injury rates for a firm. Many companies evolve their safety audit practices over time, as they build their knowledge base and comfort level with the auditing process. When recordable incidents occur, organizations audit post-event to prevent future occurrences. Thus, when a company implements a proactive safety auditing program in addition to reactive safety audits, the recordable incident rates may further decline.

When employees commit a safety infraction, companies take disciplinary action whether it is the first (SAFDISP1), second (SAFDISP2) or third (SAFDISP3) safety infraction. Only the third safety infraction disciplinary action is highly significant and inversely related to recordable incidents. Disciplinary actions varied from do nothing, verbal warnings, or written warnings to more severe actions such as time off and termination. This finding confirmed that disciplining employees

for safety infractions is an effective tool to reduce incident rates at the third occurrence. This may be because 34 percent of surveyed companies indicated time off while 56 percent of the organizations terminated employment in the third safety infraction (Table 3).

### **CONTRIBUTIONS**

This paper makes important contributions in the literature of industrial safety management. Contradictory to a popular belief that the number of training hours is an important factor in reducing recordable incident and lost time incident rates, this study found training hours to be an insignificant factor. This supports the finding of the American Transportation Research Institute in 2008. The number of safety audits had a negative impact on recordable incident rates as well as safety infractions at the third occurrence of disciplinary action. These results should affirm the importance of safety audits and disciplinary actions for safety infractions. In light of this research, organizations are encouraged to scrutinize their safety training program for content, time dedicated for topic delivery, and business justification.

### **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

In regard to safety audits, it is important for organizations to realize that an increase in the number of audits significantly reduces recordable incident rates. Thus, safety audits remain a critical component of effective safety management. The third stage of employee discipline was a significant factor with heavy emphasis on time off and termination (90 percent of surveyed companies). As a result, an organization that implements a discipline policy which includes time off or termination for safety infractions should realize a reduction in total recordable incident and lost time incident rates.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Enhancing organizational performance is a cornerstone of achieving global competitiveness. The implementation, maintenance, and improvement of safety, health, and environmental programs are of significant importance to this country as the economy of the United States moves toward a more global perspective. American Society of Safety Engineers (2002) affirms that such programs positively impact all Americans. As an organization adopts a comprehensive and strategic approach to safety management and moves away from training for compliance, strategic business advantages should be realized. The firm, which understands the importance of safety auditing and implements an aggressive discipline policy for safety infractions, should realize substantial reductions in total recordable incidents and lost time incident rates in the workplace. Obtaining a global competitive edge is a challenge. Maintaining this position is subsequently more difficult. Companies which

implement the findings determined within this study have an opportunity to link safety audits and discipline actions to strategic organizational goals, thus, optimizing the profitability and sustainability of the firm.

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# AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LEADER, MEMBER, AND INNOVATIVE OPERATION IN THE HIGH TECH INDUSTRY

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to provide the high tech industry with a concise review of the following: Big-Five personality traits, transformational leadership style, transactional leadership style, and the relationship of each of the above to innovative operation. The study was conducted using a sample of 324 members of high tech firms in Taiwan. Hybrid analyses were used to evaluate the hypotheses of the study. Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, the findings indicated that the traits of extraversion and agreeableness have a significant positive relationship to perception of innovative operation in high tech firms. Second, the active participant leadership style, which is characteristic of transformational leadership, combined with the characteristics of transactional leadership without management-by-exception, is the best way to lead team members to operating with innovation within high tech industries. A discussion of the key research findings and some suggested directions for future research are provided.*

## INTRODUCTION

After entering the WTO, business competition with other countries became even more fierce in Taiwan. The literature has noted that a firm will lose its market share if it does not innovate (Daft, 2004; Krause, 2004). Additionally, the high tech industry in Taiwan is Taiwan's most profitable industry. Thus, for top managers and the Taiwanese government, it has become important to understand how to more efficiently promote innovation to gain substantial competitive advantage. Recent studies have indicated that both top managers and members can influence the success of an organization (Beng & Robert, 2004). However, studies have also revealed that many firms fail to operate well (Glomer & Hagon, 1998; Cuban, 1999) due to low rates of member participation (McLaughlin, cited in Rudduck, 1991) and poor leadership by top managers (Shally, Zhou, & Oldman, 2004). In this regard, the aim of this study is to discuss how top managers and members, based on their personality traits and leadership styles, can successfully promote innovation.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESIS

### Personality Traits and Related Research

During the past fifteen years, there has been an increasing number of studies focusing on the relationships between personality traits and performance, collective and individual (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001). Personality traits can involve the role played, a person's thinking style, or their emotional stability over a long period of time (Funder, 2001). The most accepted categorization of personality traits is the so-called Big Five, which was proposed by Costa & McCrea (1988). The Big Five includes the personality traits of Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience.

Recent literature has proposed that Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness have strong positive relationships with work performance and the success of a firm's operation (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). Some studies have indicated that a person who possesses Neuroticism will be more likely to have negative emotions (Suls, Green, & Hills, 1998), poor work performance (Tokar & Subich, 1997), low job satisfaction (Judge and Locke, 1993; Necowitz & Roznowski, 1994), and separation from colleagues (Brief, Butcher, & Roberson, 1995).

*H1. Neuroticism has a significant negative relationship with innovative operation.*

The literature has also revealed that a member who possesses Extraversion generally has high job satisfaction (Watson & Slack, 1993; Tokar & Subich, 1997). Some researchers, however, have noted that while good job performance leads to a worker's advancement, a worker who also possesses Extraversion will achieve a top position (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Hogan & Holland, 2003). There is also literature that argues that Conscientiousness has a positive relationship with performance, success of the operation (Timothy, Chad, Carl, & Murray, 1999), and the individual's position within the company (Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998). Moreover, recent studies have also concluded that possessing Conscientiousness positively relates to attention to detail, responsibility, work performance, and academic achievement (Paunonen & Ashton, 2001; Gray & Watson, 2000; Heaven, Mark, Barry, & Ciarrochi, 2002). Regarding Openness to experience and Agreeableness, recent studies have indicated that Openness to experience plays a critical role in job training (Barrick et al., 2001; George & Zhou, 2001). Furthermore, Agreeableness has a positive relationship with successful performance because it fosters cooperation (Hogan and Holland, 2003).

*H2. Extraversion has a positive relationship with innovative operation.*

*H3. Conscientiousness has a positive relationship with innovative operation.*

*H4. Openness to experience has a positive relationship with innovative operation.*

*H5. Agreeableness has a positive relationship with innovative operation.*

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## Leadership and Related Research

The definitions of leadership are numerous (Cummings, 2001; Davis, 2003; House et al, 2004). Recent researchers have defined leadership as the process by which top managers lead their members in accordance with organizational goals (Paul, Susan, Catherine, 2007). Translational leadership is the most researched leadership theory (Judge & Bono, 2001). The questions of how to increase motivation (Charbonneau et al., 2001) and how to promote operational performance have also been studied to some extent (Barling et al., 1996; Barling et al., 2002). Because translational and transactional leadership provide a standard for top managers to understand how to foster knowledge and upgrade operational performance, this study addresses both theorems.

Top managers who are committed to translational leadership are devoted to leading while respecting the abilities of their members. They do this, at least in part, through the use of rewards (Scott, 2003). Such leaders also emphasize setting a value to achieving organizational goals to motivate members to achieve higher levels of performance (Barling, Slater, & Kelloway, 2000; Sivanathan & Fekken, 2002; Constant, William, & William, 2006; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Avolio (1999) proposed that translational leadership can be divided into four dimensions, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation.

There is a growing body of literature that indicates that top managers implement transactional leadership through three major practices: confirming the relationship between performance and reward, exchanging rewards for members' performance, and giving appropriate responses to induce members to achieve their targeted performance (Scott, 2003). Recent research has argued that transactional leadership focuses on the exchange between top managers and members (Gregory, 2006), which means that the level of job performance depends upon how many or what levels of rewards were given to members (Jung, 2001; Jung & Sosik, 2002). Bass (1985) proposed that transactional leadership can be divided into three dimensions: contingent reward, management-by-exception active, and management-by-exception passive.

A growing body of literature has indicated that translational leadership is positively related to organizational performance (DeGroot, Kiker, & Cross, 2000). Over 30% of studies on translational leadership, such as in corporate, school, and military units, conclude that translational leadership will lead to high member motivation, commitment, innovative behavior, and higher standard organizational performance (Fiol, et al., 1999; Bass et al., 2003; Scott, 2003), especially in uncertain environments (House, 1977).

*H6. Translational leadership has a positive relationship with innovative operation.*

Scott (2003) noted that because transactional leadership focuses on the exchange between rewards and performance, members will not often perform beyond the standard. Nevertheless, top

managers can either provide more rewards or force members to adopt innovations (Jung & Sosik, 2002; Gregory, 2006). Furthermore, based on Bass (1985), most top managers employ strategies that include both translational and transactional leadership.

### **Innovation Operation and Related Research**

Robbins and Coulter (2002) defined innovation as the process that adopts innovative ideas and translates those ideas into useful products and methods. Additionally, innovation is defined as a new product, service, or process that business units use (Lo, 2004; Chen, 2005). Generally, innovation can be seen as a new product (Damanpour, 1996), new process (O'Sullivan, 2000), or new invisible contribution to the working or living environment (Bantel & Jackson, 1989). The literature discussed above is a body of research that defines innovative operation as the combination between innovation and operation (Wu, & Lai, 2006; Wu, 2005; Chen, 2005). Innovative operation is intended to promote profit and a firm's competitiveness (Lo, 2004).

Research of the antecedents to innovative operation is abundant (see Miia et al., 2006). Recent studies emphasize the relationship between decision-making among top managers and innovation (Ireland et al., 2001). Summarizing the related literature, member's personality traits, educational degree (Wiersema & Bantel, 1992), background, the role of the top manager, and age (Tihanyi et al., 2000; Kilduff et al., 2000) have positive relationships with participation and performance in innovative operations (Canella et al., 2001; Tsai, Kao, Ting, & Huang, 2002; Schmit, Kihm, & Robie, 2004; Tierney, & Farmer, 2004).

### **AN EMPIRICAL STUDY**

This study was conducted using a sample of 450 workers in the high tech industry in Taiwan. A total of 450 questionnaires were sent and 337 were returned. After 13 questionnaires were discarded for statistical reasons, the overall response rate was 72%.

#### **Demographics**

Males comprised the majority of respondents (67%). The 36-45 age group was the most common (45%) with 26-35 being the next most common (34%). Additionally, the master's degree was the most common educational level attained (42%) while doctoral was the second most common (32%). Furthermore, the largest proportion of the sample (32%) had worked between 11 and 20 years and the second largest proportion (29%) had worked between 21 and 25 years. Finally, over half of the sample had more than one job (63%).

This study used the 5-point Likert scale for the questionnaire. Factor analysis was used to find major factors in three main dimensions: personality traits, leadership style, and innovative

operation. Correlation analysis was used to explore the relationship of leadership style and personality traits to innovative operation. Finally, regression analysis was used to confirm that the relationship of leadership styles and personality traits significantly correlated with innovative operation.

Before conducting factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was applied and produced values of 0.815 for personality traits, 0.903 for leadership style, and 0.796 for innovative operation. The results of the Bartlett test of sphericity were 2688.146 for personality traits, 1397.302 for leadership style, and 461.441 for innovative operation. A factor analysis was conducted with orthogonal rotation, and the results are provided in Tables 1, 2, and 3. Note that the leadership section after analysis was categorized into new two styles. Because the first factor (Translational Leadership) means that top managers promote innovative operation from the beginning and throughout the process, we renamed it “Active Participant Leadership.” In contrast, Transactional Leadership means that top managers only become involved to solve problems when the problem becomes serious. Therefore, we renamed this category “Passive Participant Leadership.” Generally, the overall Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  should be above 0.7, and each dimension’s Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  should be above 0.6. The study’s inner and outer Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  were above these levels, which suggests that the sampling results were reliable. Detailed results of the reliability analysis are provided in Table 4. The Pearson Correlation is shown in Table 5. Correlations below  $p: 0.05$  level are considered significant. A regression analysis of those significant factors is provided in Tables 6 and 7. Based on the above analyses, the confirmations of the hypotheses are summarized in Table 8.

	Factor Name	Number of Items	Eigen-value	Variance explained (%)	Total variance explained (%)
Factor Analysis	Conscientiousness	4 All Remain The Same	2.744	13.718	64.925
	Agreeableness		2.739	13.694	
	Neuroticism		2.619	13.094	
	Openness to Experience		2.537	12.687	
	Extraversion		2.347	11.733	

	Factor Name	Number of Items	Eigen-value	Variance explained (%)	Total variance explained (%)
Factor Analysis	Active Participant Leadership	6 Item from Passive Participant Leadership  *Notify with reward as soon as the performance achieved	4.547	56.834	56.834
	Passive Participant Leadership	1 One Item Move Up	1.034	12.921	69.756

	Factor Name	Number of Item	Eigen-value	Variance explained (%)	Total variance explained (%)
Factor Analysis	Innovative Operation	4 All Remain The Same	2.630	65.759	65.759

Dimension	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Conscientiousness	0.8033
Agreeableness	0.8473
Neuroticism	0.8106
Openness to Experience	0.7843
Extraversion	0.7680
Active Participant Leadership	0.9115
Passive Participant Leadership	None With One Item
Innovative Operation	0.8240

**Table 5: Correlation Analysis of Big Five Personality traits and Leadership Style**

	Innovative operation	Total N	Pearson Correlation	Significance
Personality traits	Conscientiousness	324	0.096	0.083
	Agreeableness		0.133*	0.016
	Neuroticism		0.026	0.635
	Openness to Experience		-0.023	0.681
	Extraversion		0.180**	0.001
Leadership Style	Active Participant Leadership		0.706***	0.000
	Passive Participant Leadership		0.097	0.081

\*:  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$

**Table 6: Regression Analysis of Big Five Personality Traits**

	Big Five Personality Traits	Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F Change
Innovative Operation	Agreeableness	0.133*	0.050	0.044	8.507***	0.050	8.507***
	Extraversion	0.180***					

\*:  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$

**Table 7: Regression Analysis of Leadership Style**

	Leadership Style	Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F Change
Innovative Operation	Active Participant Leadership	0.706***	0.516	0.505	48.169***	0.516	35.898***

\*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$

Number	Description	Confirmation
H1	Neuroticism has a negative relationship with innovative operation.	N
H2	Extraversion has a positive relationship with innovative operation.	Y
H3	Conscientiousness has a positive relationship with innovative operation.	Part of Y
H4	Openness to experience has a positive relationship with innovative operation.	N
H5	Agreeableness has a positive relationship with innovative operation.	Y
H6	Transformational leadership has a positive relationship with innovative operation.	Y

## DISCUSSION

### Conclusions

The results of this study reveal that among the five personality traits, Extraversion has the highest significant positive relationship with innovative operation. Therefore, the study implies that because the high tech industry is a place where emphasis is placed on producing something novel, a potential employee who possesses Extraversion should be desirable for firms. Moreover, those kinds of members are more likely to have high job satisfaction (Watson & Slack, 1993; Tokar & Subich, 1997). Because of this, they will apply themselves more in innovative operation within their high tech industries.

Agreeableness also has a positive relationship with innovative operation. This study indicates that a member who possesses this trait is more likely to get along with other employees. Because teamwork on certain projects is needed in high tech industries, members possessing this trait will be valuable. Moreover, these members will be more likely to get along with new team members and will also become accustomed to new innovative projects faster than members not possessing this trait. This result parallels the conclusions of other recent studies (Tsai, Kao, Ting, & Huang, 2002; Schmit, Kihm, & Robie, 2004).

Finally, active participant leadership has a relationship with innovative operation. The conclusions of this study are similar to those of Bass (1985) in this regard. In general, it appears that top managers develop a shared vision with their members by using idealized influence (Chang, 2006). Then, using rewards as a motivational strategy, they encourage their members to accomplish their goals with higher levels of performance (Jung & Sosik, 2002). Thus, not only will top managers who employ these methods have higher intensity towards innovative operation than those employing the other leadership styles, so too will their members.

## Practical Implications

Based on the results of this research, it appears that when hiring new members in high tech firms, the HR manager or the top manager should focus on hiring members who have Extraversion and Agreeableness. This means that they ought to take these two traits into account by using a personality trait exam as part of member selection. By doing so, it is likely that future innovative operation will be conducted more efficiently.

Moreover, in the high tech industry, active participant leadership of top managers can be seen to produce innovative operation. Hence, this study suggests that top managers need to motivate members to generate new ideas and provide different perspectives. Additionally, top managers ought to encourage the process of idea sharing. By doing this, each idea and suggestion can then be clearly presented and adjustments can be made to the products of innovative processes. Furthermore, an organization's operation, especially if it is an innovative operation, can be more efficient. These suggestions are also similar to those of recent studies (Gebert et al., 2006; James, 2006; Lin, 2006).

## Limitations of the Study

The factors that determine high tech industry success are numerous. In addition to having top managers and members, internal factors like stockholders and investors and external factors like firm size are also critical in determining the success. Using the above research as a foundation, in order to make the result of further studies more applicable, future studies should conduct research by accounting for the above effective factors.

Additionally, this study was limited to Taiwan. Other international factors such as national culture might mediate or moderate the relationship between leadership style and innovative performance. Therefore, this study finally suggests that future studies conduct research on international high tech industries, compare them to Taiwanese high tech industries, and search for more appropriate strategies for both in pursuing future development.

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# TO SPEAK OR NOT TO SPEAK: PREDICTORS OF VOICE PROPENSITY

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper investigated both individual and organizational predictors of voice propensity for a sample of 225 employees across a range of organizations. The individual variables included one personality variable, general self-efficacy, and one cultural orientation variable, high power distance. The organizational variables included whether employees perceived that their supervisors were responsive and approachable, and the number of voice mechanisms perceived to be available in the organization. This was one of the first papers to investigate the relationship of high power distance and number of voice mechanisms to voice propensity. Hierarchical regression analysis showed that voice propensity was positively related to being a supervisor, self-efficacy, and having a supervisor who was responsive and approachable. Voice propensity was negatively related to high power distance. Results suggest that organizations that want to promote employee voice should work on increasing employee self-efficacy through selection or training. They may also need to train supervisors to be approachable and more receptive to employee complaints and suggestions. Finally, organizations also need to learn how to encourage voice among employees who have a high power distance orientation. In the United States we generally expect that people who have something to say will voice orally and directly, but with increasingly diverse workforces, organizations might need to encourage other forms of voice.*

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several articles in both academic and trade publications have discussed the benefits of continuous learning in organizations. One of the conditions necessary but not sufficient for continuous learning is a process of inquiry (Argyris & Schon, 1996). According to Argyris and Schon (1996) it is the detection of error ... “that triggers awareness of a problematic situation and sets in motion the inquiry aimed at correcting the error” (p. 31). One mechanism for bringing errors to the attention of those who can make corrections is employee voice. In interviews with senior executives and employees from a variety of organizations, Perlow and Williams (2003) found that the lack of voice in organizations “can exact a high psychological price on individuals, generating feelings of humiliation, pernicious anger, resentment, and the like that, if unexpressed, contaminate every interaction, shut down creativity, and undermine productivity” (p.52).

In the past couple of decades several researchers have investigated both the predictors and outcomes of employee voice, but definitions and measures of voice have varied somewhat depending on the purpose of the investigation. The term voice was first identified by Hirschman (1970) who argued that employees might respond to dissatisfaction by either voicing their disagreement or exiting. The idea of voice as active dissent dominated the research on exit, voice and loyalty for a number of years. Then Rusbult and colleagues (1988) expanded the scope of the voice definition to include efforts by the employees to improve working conditions. They defined voice as “actively and constructively trying to improve conditions through discussing problems with a supervisor or coworkers, taking action to solve problems, suggesting solutions, seeking help from an outside agency like a union, or whistle-blowing” (1988, p.601). In a related vein, Van Dyne and LePine (1998) defined voice as “promotive behavior that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge intended to improve rather than criticize” (p. 109). In a 2004 study of managerial interpretations of employee voice in eighteen organizations in England, Scotland and Ireland, Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington and Ackers found that the most frequently stated purpose of voice was contributing to managerial decision-making. They stated that voice was both the articulation of individual dissatisfaction and employee contribution through communication channels.

Regardless of the definition, agreement exists that employee voice is an extra-role behavior that challenges the status quo. According to Van Dyne and LePine (1998) extra-role behaviors are “(1) not specified in advance by role prescriptions, (2) not recognized by formal reward systems, and (3) not a source of punitive consequence when not performed by job incumbents” (p. 108). Therefore, the cognitive decision-making process that employees use in deciding whether to voice, might be more complicated than the process they use to engage in required role behaviors such as job performance. Previous research suggests that in order for employees to voice their concerns or make suggestions for change four conditions need to exist: (1) they must have something to say (Frese, Teng & Wijnen, 1999; Morrison & Phelps, 1999); (2) they must feel that it is their responsibility to speak up (Fuller, Marler & Hester, 2006); (3) they must believe that the benefits of speaking up will outweigh the costs (Fuller, Barnett, Hester, Relyea & Frey, 2007; Gorden, Infante & Graham, 1988; Krefting & Powers, 1998); and (4) they must believe that their suggestions will be treated seriously and will have some impact on the organization and/or its employees (Parker, 1993). Whether these conditions are met will depend both on individual characteristics and the organizational context.

The purpose of this study is not to test a complete model of all four factors, but to examine two individual characteristics and two organizational context factors (as perceived by individual employees) that might be particularly important. The two individual characteristics are general self-efficacy and power distance orientation. Self-efficacy may influence whether employees believe they have anything to say that will be taken seriously by management, while high power distance may influence whether employees believe it is their responsibility to speak up. General self-efficacy, a personality trait, has been found to have a strong-relationship to several organizational

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behaviors, but only a couple of studies (Avery, 2003; Parker, 1993) have examined the relationship between self-efficacy and voice. The relationship of power distance to voice has only been directly investigated in one study (Xu Huang, Van de Vliert & Van der Vegt, 2007), yet this factor could be very important as workforces in organizations become increasingly diverse and multicultural.

The organizational context variables included in this study are whether employees perceive that their supervisors are good voice managers, and the number of voice mechanisms they perceive are available within the organization. Both of these variables may influence whether employees perceive the benefits of speaking up outweigh the costs, and whether they believe the organization will take their comments seriously. With the exception of grievance procedures in unionized settings, only a couple of studies have examined voice mechanisms in relation to employee voice (Frese et al., 1999, Spencer, 1996).

The definition of voice in this study is what Kassing (1998, 2000) defined as “articulated dissent: expressing dissent openly and clearly in a constructive fashion within organizations to audiences that can effectively influence organizational adjustment” (Kassing, 2000, p.61). This is very similar to Detert and Burris’ voice construct, verbal behavior that is improvement oriented and directed towards a specific target who holds power inside the organization (2007, p. 870). In line with many previous studies, this study investigates voice propensity (self-reports of voice intention) rather than actual voice behavior (Fuller et. al., 2007; Kassing, 2000; Lee & Jablin, 1992; Saunders, Sheppard, Knight & Roth, 1992). Van Dyne and LePine (1998) found that self-reported voice was stable over time and positively related to peer and supervisory ratings of voice behavior. Also research has shown that intention is often a good predictor of actual behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977).

## INDIVIDUAL PREDICTORS

### Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a central concept in Bandura’s (1997) social learning theory and refers to the confidence that people have that they are competent and that their task efforts will be effective. According to Bandura (1997) people weigh and evaluate information about their abilities, and use this information to make choices about whether and how to act. However, Bandura emphasized that self-efficacy is situation specific and malleable over time. In contrast, general self-efficacy has also been conceptualized as a core self-evaluation, relatively stable over time and situations (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997; Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2004). Since voice is not a specific task behavior, it is more likely to be related to general than specific self-efficacy. General self-efficacy may influence whether employees believe they have something to say, because if they do not believe they are competent, they are unlikely to think about areas for improvement in the first place. General

self-efficacy may also influence whether they believe their behavior can really make a difference. Employees will only take risks if they perceive some benefit to their action.

General self-efficacy has been found to be related to several organizational behaviors including work performance (Judge & Bono, 2001), idea generation (Gist, 1989), and newcomer career adjustment (Saks, 1995). Studies have also found that general self-efficacy is related to extra-role promotive behaviors. Parker (1993) found a positive relationship between self-efficacy and willingness to dissent, with dissent defined similarly to voice, while Frese, Teng and Wijnen (1998) found a positive relationship between self-efficacy and having ideas, a precursor to voice. In a study by Avery (2004), self-efficacy was positively related to the value individual's placed on voice, and McNab and Worthley (2007) found a positive relationship between general self-efficacy and internal whistleblowing. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

*H1: General self-efficacy will be positively related to voice propensity.*

### **Individual Cultural Orientation**

As mentioned previously, only one study (Xu Huang, Van de Vliert, & Van der Vegt, 2007) has explicitly investigated the relationship of cultural orientation to voice. However, the increasing diversity of the workforce, and the globalization of organizations could have a significant impact on whether and how employees speak up. Hofstede's (1980) four dimensional framework of cultural differences (collectivism-individualism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity-femininity), although not without its critics, is perhaps one of the most cited in the organizational behavior literature (Albers-Miller & Gelb, 1996; Egan & Bendick, 2007). Of these four dimensions, the one that is perhaps most relevant to employee voice is power distance. Power distance refers to the extent to which the less powerful members in an organization expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. In high power distance cultures individuals are much more likely to believe that the boss is right merely because he or she is the boss (Hofstede, 1980). Everyone has his/her rightful place in society and the organizational hierarchy is very important. Power holders are entitled to privileges not available to those lower in the hierarchy (Hofstede, 1983). Employees in low power distance cultures are more likely than employees in high power cultures to believe that they should have some input into the decision-making process. Also, because they are more constrained by prescribed role expectations, employees in high power distance cultures are less likely to engage in extra-role behaviors (Costigan et al., 2006) and may be afraid to disagree with their superiors.

Although Hofstede defined his dimensions as characteristics of countries, others have pointed out that there may be considerable cultural differences within a country, and thus they have measured and examined these dimensions at the level of the individual (Ranamoorthy & Carrol, 1998; Triandis, 1996; Wagner, 1995). McNab and Worthley (2008) found a negative relationship

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between high power distance and internal reporting for samples of Americans and Canadians, while Xu Huang, Van de Vliert, and Van der Vegt (2005) found a negative relationship between high power distance and voice. Individuals with a high power distance orientation are unlikely to believe that they have anything important to say, and even if they do have an idea, they will not believe that it is their responsibility to speak up. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

*H2: High power distance will be negatively related to voice propensity.*

## **ORGANIZATIONAL PREDICTORS**

Although some individuals may have predispositions towards speaking up in the workplace, the organizational culture may inhibit open communication. Several researchers have emphasized the importance of an organizational culture that is conducive to employee voice (Rao, Landau & Chia, 2001; Gordon et al., 1988; Kassing, 2000). The organization provides both the informal and formal channels through which extra-role communication can flow. Formal mechanisms include systems such as grievance procedures, suggestion boxes, open door policies, and lunch with the CEO. Informal mechanisms may include talking to peers or supervisors on a casual basis. This study investigates both formal and informal mechanisms.

### **Supervisors as Competent Voice Managers**

Speaking with a supervisor can either be a formal or informal method of voicing one's opinion. This is a formal method when it is perceived as part of a broader open door policy, or when the supervisor has regular meetings with employees, either individually or in groups, for the purpose of soliciting opinions and suggestions. Employees can also choose to speak with supervisors informally at anytime during the work day. In a study by Olson-Buchanan and Boswell (2002) employees said that they would be most likely to voice discontent by communicating with or seeking the assistance of a supervisor. Voicing to a supervisor, however, can be a risky proposition, because the supervisor usually has the power to influence an employee's work status, e.g. work assignments, pay raises, and promotions. Rowe and Baker (1984) found that professionals were reluctant to voice their concerns to their superiors because they feared that their career progress would be stymied. Employees are only likely to voice to management if they perceive that the benefits of speaking up outweigh the costs, and that their suggestions will be treated seriously. Saunders, Sheppard, Knight and Roth (1992), Janssen, de Vries and Cozijnse (1998), and Chia, Landau and Ong (2001) found that employee's willingness to voice was facilitated by supervisors who were good voice managers.

Saunders, Sheppard, Knight and Roth (1992) identified two different dimensions of supervisory voice management, approachability and responsiveness. Approachability or receptivity refers to the extent employees feel they can bring their concerns to their supervisors without being

penalized (Saunders et al. 1992). According to Gorden et al. (1988) receptivity is important in “the perception that one’s superior encourages argument, likes to examine issues argumentatively, and is not likely to attack verbally the self-worth of someone who disputes a point” (p. 104). Responsiveness refers to the extent to which supervisors are prompt and willing to take action to deal with the issues voiced by employees (Saunders, Sheppard, Knight & Roth, 1992). Employees are more likely to voice if they believe those in authority take their opinions into account when decisions are made (Parker, 1993). Kassing (2000) found that subordinates who perceived having high-quality relationships with their supervisors reported using significantly more articulated dissent (which he defined as a subset of voice), while a study by Vakola and Bouradas (2005) showed that the best predictor of organizational silence, which they defined as the opposite of voice, was the supervisor’s attitude towards silence. Detert and Burris (2007) found that manager openness was related to voice, particularly for high-performing subordinates. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

*H3: Employees who perceive that their supervisors are competent voice managers will report greater voice propensity than employees who perceive that their supervisors are poor voice managers.*

### **Voice Mechanisms**

If an employee has a supervisor who is not approachable or receptive, or the employee’s problem is with the supervisor, he/she may choose other sources to voice his/her concerns and suggestions. Most large organizations in the United States have instituted various mechanisms that employees can use to voice their ideas and complaints such as open-door policies, grievance systems, regular team meetings, suggestions boxes, and hotlines. While there have been several studies on unionized grievance procedures as a proxy for voice, other voice mechanisms have largely been ignored in the literature. Olson-Buchanan and Boswell (2002) investigated whether loyal employees prefer formal or informal methods of voicing discontent, but did not look at mechanisms as predictors of employee voice. The existence of several voice mechanisms within an organization could be a signal to employees that management wants them to speak up and will take their concerns seriously. This could also indicate that the organization is committed to due process, which would decrease fear of retaliation. A study by Spencer (1986) showed that high numbers of voice mechanisms were positively related to employees’ expectations for problem resolution. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

*H4: Controlling for organizational size, number of voice methods in the organization will be positively related to voice propensity.*

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A couple of researchers (Harlos, 2001; Potter, 2006) have argued, however, that the number of voice mechanisms in the organization might actually exacerbate employees' feelings of discontent if they use the mechanisms, but their concerns and suggestions fall on deaf ears. Also, in some cases employees may receive messages, either implicitly or explicitly, that if they actually attempt to use these mechanisms, there may be negative consequences. Therefore, this study also includes an exploratory analysis of which voice mechanisms individuals have actually used in their organizations, and whether they were satisfied with the outcome.

### **Control Variables**

Several demographic variables have been found to be related to employee voice including gender, education, and age. Research has shown that males are more likely to voice than females (LePine & VanDyne, 1998), older employees are more likely to speak up than younger employees (Luchak, 2003), and those with higher levels of education are more likely to voice than those with less education (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). Studies have also shown that managers are more likely to speak up than non-managers (Kassing & Avtgis, 1999), and those with greater tenure are more likely to voice than those with less tenure. (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2001). Therefore, these variables were controlled for, as were two organization variables, organizational size and whether the respondent is a member of a union. Very small organizations will not have any formal voice procedures, and level of interaction among employees may be quite different than the level of interaction in larger organizations. In a unionized company, employees may, by contract, be required to use more formal voice procedures than in nonunionized companies, and the supervisor may not play as large a role.

## **METHODS AND MEASUREMENT**

### **Subjects and Procedure**

The subjects for this study were business school students at a state college in the Northeast, and their friends and/or coworkers. One hundred and fifty-four students, who worked 20 or more hours per week, were asked to participate and identify at least one friend or coworker who might also like to participate. On-line cover letters and surveys were sent to each of the volunteers' email addresses to keep track of who responded, and to prevent someone from responding more than once. The letter explained that participants would receive a copy of the survey results, and their names would be entered into a drawing for two \$50 prizes. Three hundred and twenty-nine surveys were sent out and 225 were completed for a response rate of 68%. Average age was 26, ranging from 18 to 59, and average organizational tenure was 4.01 years. Fifty-six percent were female, 20% were minority, 91% were raised in the United States, 8% belonged to a union, and 46% had supervisory

responsibilities. Twenty-five percent worked in organizations with less than 20 employees, 24% in organizations with greater than 20 but less than 100 employees, and 48% in organizations with 100 or more employees. Seventy-nine percent worked for profit organizations, 13% for non-profits (non-government), and 6% for government.

## Measures

The scales in this study, with the exception of number of voice mechanisms, were borrowed from previous research. To corroborate the measures and test for common method variance, items from the voice propensity, power distance, and supervisor as voice manager scales were analyzed using principal components with varimax rotation. Results showed the presence of three distinct factors with eigen values of greater than one, but some of the items loaded highly on more than one factor, and decreased the reliability of the scales. These items were eliminated from further analysis. Table 1 shows the factor analysis for the retained items.

	Component		
	1	2	3
Voice1	-.214	.628	-.173
Voice2	.224	.612	-.155
Voice3	.049	.662	-.139
Voice4	.148	.617	-.291
Voice5	.089	.561	.043
Voice6	.269	.565	.087
Power Distance1	-.009	.010	.752
Power Distance2	.048	-.143	.750
Power Distance3	-.060	-.229	.729
Supervisor1	.818	.122	-.007
Supervisor2	.789	.232	-.023
Supervisor3	.854	.089	-.083
Supervisor4	.871	.024	-.031
Supervisor5	.868	.102	-.026
Supervisor6	.834	.052	-.051

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### **Voice Propensity**

Voice Propensity was measured by a shortened version of Kassing's (2000) Likert-type nine item articulated dissent scale. Response alternatives ranged from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. The voice propensity items included: (1) I am hesitant to raise questions or contradictory opinions in my organization; (2) I do not question management; (3) I am hesitant to question workplace policies; (4) I don't tell my supervisor when I disagree with workplace decisions; (5) I make suggestions to management or my supervisor about correcting inefficiency in my organization; and (6) I tell management when I believe employees are being treated unfairly. Items 1 through 4 were reverse scored, and the items were summed and averaged. The mean for the scale was 3.6, the SD was .57, and the alpha coefficient was .70.

### **Supervisor as Voice Manager**

Supervisor as voice manager was measured by a shortened version of a scale developed by Saunders et al. (1992). The items included in the scale were: (1) My boss handles my concerns promptly; (2) My boss listens carefully to what I say when I bring in a concern; (3) My boss is fair when I take a concern to him/her; (4) My boss takes action to correct the concerns that I speak to him or her about; (5) My boss gives high priority to handling employee concerns; and (6) My boss listens to what I say when I bring in a concern. The items were averaged. The mean for the scale was 3.6, the SD was .85 and the alpha coefficient was .92.

### **Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy was measured by the ten item English version of the general self-efficacy scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). This scale has been validated in numerous studies and in 26 languages (see Scholz, Gutierrez-Dona, Sud & Schwarzer, 2002). Item examples include: (1) I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough, and (2) I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities. Response alternatives ranged from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. The mean for the scale was 3.9 the SD was .46, and the standardized alpha coefficient was .79.

### **High Power Distance**

Power distance was measured by items developed by Yoo and Donthu (2002). Response alternatives ranged from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. The power distance items included: (1) People in higher positions should not socialize with people in lower positions; (2) People in lower positions should not disagree with people in higher positions; and (3) People in

higher positions should not ask opinions of people in lower positions. The mean was 1.8, the SD .66, and the alpha coefficient was .65. Although the alpha coefficient for this scale was less than the .70 cut-off recommended by Nunally (1978), it is comparable to what has been found in previous studies (Madzar, 2005; Oyserman, Coon & Kimmelmeier, 2002).

### Voice Methods

From a review of the academic and trade literature, 12 different methods were identified that organizations may use to encourage people to speak up. Participants were asked to indicate whether (1) We have this available; (2) We don't have this available or (3) I don't know if we have this available. This was a measure of how many methods the respondents perceived that the organization had, and not the actual number of methods available. The methods and the responses are listed in Table 2. The scale was created by adding the number of methods available. The scale ranged from 0 to 9 (one respondent), the mode was 0, and the median was 2. Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that a particular voice mechanism was available to them within the organization.

	Yes, we have this available.	No, we don't have this available.	I don't know if we have this available
Suggestion box	28% (63)	56% (126)	14% (14)
Suggestion committee	10% (23)	69% (156)	18% (41)
Grievance committee - non-union	8% (19)	64% (144)	25% (56)
Grievance committee – union	10% (23)	62% (140)	24% (53)
Meeting with Human Resources Manager	39% (88)	43% (97)	15% (33)
Ombudsman	8% (19)	48% (109)	40% (91)
Open door policy	59% (133)	19% (43)	19% (42)
Regular department meetings	60% (136)	30% (67)	7% (16)
Lunch with the CEO	23% (51)	57% (128)	18% (41)
Newsletter opinion page	14% (31)	64% (143)	19% (43)
Intranet suggestion system	16% (37)	64% (143)	17% (38)
Hotline	21% (48)	55% (124)	16% (37)

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### **Exploratory Variables**

For the exploratory analysis respondents were asked whether they had used any of the voice mechanisms, and whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the outcome.

### **Control Variables**

The survey included single item questions on gender, race, age, organizational tenure, job tenure, size of the organization, union membership, whether respondents were raised in the United States, and whether they had any supervisory responsibilities. Gender, race, size of the organization, union membership, raised in the U.S, and whether the participants had any supervisory responsibilities were dummy coded.

## **ANALYSIS**

As a first step, zero-order correlations were examined among voice propensity and the control variables: gender, age, raised in the United States, minority/nonminority, job tenure, organizational tenure, union membership, organizational size, and supervisory responsibility. Only supervisory responsibility had a positive relationship to voice propensity (0 = no supervisory responsibility, 1 = supervisory responsibility). Also, as expected there was a strong positive correlation between number of voice mechanisms and size of the organization (0 = fewer than 100 employees, 1 = 100 or more employees). Due to the lack of relationships and size of the sample, only size and supervisory responsibility were included in the regression equations.

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations and inter-correlation matrix for the dependent and independent variables. Voice propensity was positively related to self-efficacy, supervisor as voice manager, and number of voice methods available in the organization, and negatively related to high power distance. Results showed that one of the independent variables, self-efficacy, was correlated with all of the other independent variables. Also number of voice mechanisms was positively related to supervisor as voice manager, and negatively related to high power distance.

The hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analysis. Missing values were replaced with the mean. The control variables, size and supervisory responsibility, were entered first. Next, the individual variables, general self-efficacy and power distance were entered. These are characteristics individuals bring with them to the organization, and therefore, temporally, they precede perceptions of organizational characteristics. Finally, the two organizational variables (as perceived by employees), supervisor as voice manager, and number of voice mechanisms were entered. The results are shown in Table 4.

**Table 3: Means, SD's and Intercorrelation Matrix**

	Mean	SD	Voice propensity	Org. Size	Supervisory responsibility	Self efficacy	Power distance	Voice manager
Voice propensity	3.58	.58						
Org. Size	.50	.50	.03					
Supervisory responsibilities	.46	.50	.20**	-.10				
Self-Efficacy	3.95	.47	.29**	-.15*	.10*			
High power distance	1.79	.66	-.31**	.06	-.11*			
Supervisor as voice manager	3.56	.83	.30**	-.08	.10	.23**	-.11	
Number of Mechanisms	2.59	2.24	.18*	.30**	.12	.17*	-.13*	.22**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 4: Hierarchical Regression Analysis**

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	$\Delta R^2$
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	
Org, Size <sup>2</sup>	-.10	-.02	-.04	
Supervisory Responsibility <sup>3</sup>	.20*	.19*	.16*	.04*
Self-efficacy		.23**	.18**	
High power distance		-.27**	-.25**	.14**
Supervisor as voice manager			.20**	
Number of voice mechanisms			.10	.05*
R <sup>2</sup>	.04	.18	.23	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.03*	.17	.21**	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
1 N=225  
2 1=100 employees or more, 2=fewer than 100 employees  
3 1=has supervisory responsibilities, 0=no supervisory responsibilities

Controlling for whether the respondent had supervisory responsibility (those with supervisory responsibility reported greater voice propensity) and size of the organization, Hypothesis 1, self-efficacy will be positively related to voice propensity, was supported. Hypothesis 2, high power distance will be positively related to voice propensity, was also supported. Together, the individual variables accounted for 14% of the variance ( $F$ ?  $r$ -squared = 19,  $p < .001$ ).

Table 4 shows that the organizational variables explained 5% of the variance of voice propensity ( $F$ ?  $r$ -squared = 6.4,  $p < .01$ ), but this was entirely due to supervisor as voice manager. Therefore, Hypothesis 3, employees who feel that their supervisors are good voice managers will report greater propensity to voice than others, was supported. However, Hypothesis 4, number of organizational voice methods will be positively related to voice propensity was not supported, although there was a zero-order correlation between number of methods and voice propensity. Number of methods was positively correlated with supervisor as voice manager, which could account for its lack of significance in the regression equation. Results showed that the most frequently reported mechanisms in organizations were open door policies and regular department meetings, followed by meetings with the Human Resources Manager. The least common methods were ombudsman and a non-union grievance committee. With the exception of regular department meetings, a surprisingly large percentage of respondents did not know whether voice mechanisms existed in their organizations.

Results of the exploratory analysis also showed that only four of these mechanisms were actually used to any extent. The most widely used mechanism was department meetings (50.3%), and 86% said they were satisfied with results. The second most widely used mechanism was an open-door policy (39.5%), and 87% of those who used that method said that they were satisfied with the results. Eighteen percent of respondents said they had used a suggestion box (73% satisfied with results), while 13.8% had had lunch with the CEO (85% satisfied).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate both individual and organizational predictors of voice propensity. Predictors were chosen based on the premise that in order to speak up employees must believe they have something to say, feel it is their responsibility to speak up, believe that the benefits of speaking up will outweigh the costs, and that their suggestions will be taken seriously. Individual variables should largely determine whether individuals have something to say and believe they have the responsibility to say it. The individual variables included in this study were self and power distance. Characteristics of the organization are more likely to influence whether the benefits outweigh the costs, and whether suggestions will be taken seriously. The two organizational characteristics (as perceived by respondents), in this study were whether the supervisor was a good voice manager, and number of voice mechanisms available in the

organization. Results showed that voice propensity was positively related to having supervisory responsibility, self efficacy, low power distance and having a supervisor who was a good voice manager.

The importance of the individual characteristic predictors suggests that some employees have a predisposition to speak up, regardless of whether the organizational culture is conducive to employee voice. Given the low variance of self-efficacy in the sample compared to other samples (Schwarzer, 2005), which would attenuate any relationships, this personality variable is clearly critical to voice propensity. Self-efficacy was also positively related to having a competent voice manager and having supervisory responsibilities, and negatively related to high power distance. Since these three variables were all related to voice propensity, self-efficacy could have an indirect as well as direct effect. Clearly, organizations could benefit from hiring employees with greater self-efficacy. Studies have suggested that it might be possible for organizations to increase task self-efficacy through training (Cole & Latham, 1997; Avery, 2003). Whether training can increase general self-efficacy, a more stable core self-evaluation, is open to debate. However, a pretest-posttest field study by Schwoerer, May, Hollensbe and Mencl (2005) found that an intensive five-day training workshop for newly hired recruits increased both specific and general self-efficacy.

Results of this study also showed that high power distance was negatively related to voice propensity. Ninety-one percent of the respondents in this study grew up in the United States, so the variance was more limited than it would be for a sample of employees from different countries. The academic and practitioner literature in the United States attests to the importance of voice in fostering innovation and organizational learning, so employees with a high power distance orientation could be a detriment to organizations. However, most studies on voice or voice propensity focus on employees speaking up directly to supervisors or upper management. Perhaps those with a high power distance orientation would be more willing to speak up in more indirect ways. Future research needs to examine the different ways employees might voice across cultures, and ways that organizations can encourage different voice channels.

The positive relationship between voice propensity and having a supervisor who is a competent voice manager in this study parallels results found in other studies (Chia, Landau & Ong, 2001; Detert & Burris, 2007; Kassing, 2000; Saunders et al., 1992; Vakola & Bouradas, 2005). Supervisors need to be trained to identify and understand the fears and needs of subordinates and how these factors influence voice behavior. They need to be trained in how best to elicit input from employees, how to listen to employees without becoming defensive, as well as how to implement good suggestions. Organizations can also encourage supervisors to gain competence in managing voice by including voice management as a component in their performance appraisal evaluations.

This study showed that voice propensity was not related to the number of voice mechanisms in the organization once other variables were controlled for. Perhaps employees have no need for alternate voice mechanisms if their supervisors are competent voice managers. Also, the effectiveness of the two mechanisms that were reportedly used most frequently, open door policy

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and regular department meetings, are likely highly dependent on the approachability of the supervisor. Number of voice mechanisms was positively correlated with supervisor as effective voice manager. Organizations that have more voice mechanisms might understand the importance of voice and encourage managers to be approachable and receptive to their subordinates' complaints and suggestions. Supervisors who are good voice managers might also be more likely to tell subordinates about the voice mechanisms available in the organization. Future studies should examine not only the number of voice mechanisms available, but whether those mechanisms are used, and whether the outcomes are favorable. In this study, the mechanisms were not used by enough of the respondents to empirically test whether effectiveness was related to voice propensity.

### **Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

This study has several weaknesses. First, voice propensity was measured rather than actual voice behavior. This has been an ongoing weakness in the voice literature. Only Van Dyne and LePine (1998) included multiple measures of voice in the same study, but as with other studies they relied on survey data. Completing the survey instrument is, in itself, a form of voice which could lead to restriction of range in the dependent variable. Actual voice behavior is very difficult to measure. A supervisor can rate subordinates according to whether they speak up, but a supervisor will never know when employees may have a complaint or suggestion that they choose not to mention. In future studies employees could be asked to keep diaries of any work concerns or ideas they might have, whether they tell anybody about the ideas, and whom they tell.

Second, all the variable in this study were measured by a single questionnaire, which could lead to common method variance. Common method biases tend to inflate type I errors of finding relationships where none may exist. Spector (2006) suggests, however, that "the problem of common method variance is often overstated and there is little empirical evidence that it produces systematic variance in observations that inflates correlations to any significant degree" (p.221). Another related problem, however, which could cause common method variance is social desirability. The mean for self-efficacy in this study was .39, a point higher than the estimated population mean (Schwarzer, 2005). Students may be reluctant to admit that they are unsure of their abilities. As mentioned previously, however, the variance was also small which is likely to attenuate rather than inflate any relationship.

Third, we limited our dependent variable to willingness to voice directly to management. Previous studies have also only looked at a narrow range of voice behavior. However, voice can vary both by mode or channel, and content. Voice can be formal or informal, as discussed previously, and direct or indirect. An employee can directly voice his/her concerns at a department meeting, or informally talk to individuals before a meeting so that his or her concern is actually voiced by someone else, perhaps someone who is in a better position to be heard. In terms of content, voice can be categorized according to whether it is directed at changing individual

circumstances, the group environment, or the organization as a whole. Future studies could examine how mode and content of voice might vary across organizational and national cultures.

Fourth, the participants in this study were almost all lower level employees and relatively young. Many of them expect to find other jobs once they receive their management degrees and therefore they may not perceive that they have as much to lose as higher level employees more established in their careers. If their jobs are only temporary, they may also have less to gain. Therefore, the results of this study need to be replicated among a variety of samples.

Finally, in this study only 23% of the variance of voice propensity was explained by the predictor variables. Although this is comparable to the amount of variance explained in other voice studies, clearly some important variables have been omitted. The purpose of this study was not to test a complete model, but to replicate a couple of relationships found in other studies and to look at a couple of predictors that had not been examined previously. All the variables, here, were at the individual level of analysis, but organizational level factors may also be important. Morrison (2000) suggests that there may be powerful forces at work within companies that lead to a collective phenomenon of organizational silence. Future studies should include both individual and contextual variables (at the organizational level of analysis) to determine why employees may or may not speak up.

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# NEGOTIATION RECOGNITION AND THE PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING

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## ABSTRACT

*Because of the complex pressures facing businesses, organizations must ensure that employees have the skills necessary to negotiate conflicts. A crucial question is how negotiation is defined, whether an individual knows they are involved in a negotiation process instead of a static situation, and to what degree they have control of the negotiated outcome. This paper informs future negotiation research on the correct approach to control for perceived negotiation appropriateness in studies of negotiation process and skills.*

## OBJECTIVE

A basic process of human behavior is the ability to negotiate both in interpersonal and organizational interactions. There is a large body of research on negotiator characteristics and the influence that these characteristics have upon the negotiation process and outcomes.

Much of the existing literature focuses on the negotiation skill and traits associated with achieving a favorable outcome from the negotiation process. This concern for individual efficacy in the negotiation process is consistent with the pressures challenging global business. In the complex environment facing global business, organizations must ensure that employees have the skills necessary to negotiate conflicts.

A potential shortcoming of this line of research is that individuals may differ in their perception of the appropriateness of negotiation, particularly intensive negotiation. Crucial questions that may influence the individual's reaction include how negotiation is defined; whether an individual knows they are involved in a negotiation process instead of a static situation; and to what degree they are perceived to have control of the negotiated outcome. A perceived situational ambiguity may influence who chooses to negotiate. The analysis is similar to the difference between problem recognition and problem solving skills. Recognizing the opportunity to negotiate precedes negotiation.

This paper directly addresses the nature of negotiation recognition in the negotiation process. There are two potential approaches to situational ambiguity. First, it could be treated as a one-dimensional indexed trait like risk aversion. Just as some individuals are more risk

averse, perhaps some individuals are more prone to avoid intense negotiation if it might not be appropriate. Alternatively, the appropriateness of negotiation may be a matter of individual perception. If so then different individuals will have different ratings for the appropriateness of a negotiation process. The relationship between these ratings will not show a dominance of negotiators versus negotiation avoiders, but rather a non-transitive ordering of when negotiation is appropriate. Educational and life experience define an individual's outlook on the negotiation process.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

John Nash presented bargaining as a nonzero-sum two person game with the opportunity for mutual benefit. How much satisfaction each individual should expect from the situation determines the "solution" to the negotiation (1950). Although Rubin and Brown (1975) defined negotiation as the process of deciding what each will give and take in an exchange, the key element of negotiation occurs "whenever the allocation of gains among participants to an agreement is subject to their own choice rather than predetermined by their circumstances" (Cross, 1969, p 1). Negotiation involves agreements in concert (Conger, 1998), but management educators who teach negotiation recognize that managers often have little experience and very differing views of when negotiation is appropriate (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954; Ross & Ward, 1995, 1996; Pronin, Puccio, & Ross, 2002). Filipczak in 1994 found an estimated \$50.6 billion is spent on formal training programs and that there has been a 30-40% increase in training for specific interpersonal skills in the area of negotiation.

Education, gender, and life experience define an individual's outlook on how negotiation is used to control an outcome (Bowles, Babcock, & McGinn, 2005; Stuhlmacher and Walters, 1999; Deaux & LaFrance, 1998; Deaux & Major, 1987; Maccoby, 1990); Kray, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2002; ). How an individual views negotiation is an indicator of whether they realize they are involved in a process instead of a static situation, and to what degree they have control of the negotiated outcome (Mead, 1934; Savitsky, Epley & Gilovich, 2001; Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Davis, 1983; Epley, Savitsky & Gilovich, 2002). Whether a situation is considered a negotiable process is an individual decision often based on preconceived norms. For example, some consumers would never consider a purchase of jewelry at a department store a negotiation process whereas a purchase of the same jewelry at an antique store or flea market would automatically lead to negotiation. An anticipation of a negotiation process sets the agenda for expectations and leads to "levels of disconfirmation and perceptions in regard to negotiation counterparts" (Balakrishnan, Patton, & Lewis, 1993). While one employee thinks that raises and company benefits are open for bargaining, the next employee may have different expectations about whether haggling is possible when discussing these work-place items. Situational ambiguity results in blurring of the limits and appropriate standards for bargaining situations

(Bowles, Babcock & McGinn, 2005; Van Lange & Visser, 1999). To this result, not negotiating a starting salary may mean hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost income, especially for those who might gain an advantage simply by knowing that it is acceptable to ask (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). There are mixed conclusions in the research concerning the success of women and men in negotiation (Rubin & Brown, 1975; Thompson, 1990) but some studies suggest that men gain more profits than their women counterparts (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; King & Hinson, 1994). How decisions are negotiated is determined by the perception of risks involved in the change process and the extent of resistance to change.

This study demonstrates the nature of differences in the recognition of negotiation opportunities by gender and education status.

### THEORY OF NEGOTIATION RECOGNITION

The decision of whether to initiate negotiation can be presented as an expected utility maximization problem. The individual must choose between the acceptance of a certain outcome or the probabilistic outcome from negotiation where the weighted payoffs are determined in part by the relative ability to negotiate. In the presence of situation ambiguity the payoffs from negotiation are further discounted based on whether the opportunity to negotiate is recognized.

The formulation of the problem is an extension of the traditional treatment of decision making under uncertainty. For outcomes  $x$  and  $y$  with probabilities  $b$  and  $(1-b)$  risk aversion is the situation where:

$$U(bx+(1-b)y) > bU(x) + (1-b)U(y).$$

The expected utility function  $U$  is concave and the utility from the certain outcome exceeds the expected utility of the gamble. Consumers can be ordered by their degree of risk aversion and reliable measures of behavior developed.

Situational ambiguity in negotiation may manifest itself in three aspects of the probabilistic formulation. First, individuals may differ in their optimism as to the potential gains from negotiation. Thus the ‘winning’ payout  $y$  becomes specific to the individual  $y_i$ . Similarly the potential downside to negotiation including any potential transaction cost will also be individual specific,  $x_i$ . Finally, the subjective probability of failure or success,  $b_i$  and  $(1-b_i)$  are also individual. Thus each individual faces a unique transformation of expected utility comparing:

$$U(b_i x_i + (1-b_i) y_i) \text{ to } b_i U(x_i) + (1-b_i) U(y_i).$$

If the differences in perceived situational ambiguity are specific to the individuals self assessment of their negotiation ability or their optimism or pessimism regarding outcomes then one would expect a transitive ordering. That is, individuals with a higher expectation of positive payouts to negotiation  $y_i$ , would also exhibit higher expectations of success  $(1-b_i)$  and lower expectations of the cost of failure  $x_i$ . This would imply the same individuals are more likely to negotiate in any situation. The absence of transitivity implies that the same individual may exhibit confidence in negotiation for some circumstances but reticence in others. Testing this implication is an important precursor to correctly design further research.

### METHODOLOGY

The empirical question for the pilot study is whether there is an apparent dominant ordering of individual recognition of negotiation opportunities. If the discounting of negotiation is a one-dimensional variable then the same individuals will always be less likely to view a situation as appropriate for negotiation. Even in this circumstance the one-dimensional index may have some predictable traits such as age and gender. However, when perceived negotiation appropriateness is more complex no single cohort is always the most likely to negotiate. The relative likelihood of negotiation changes with the circumstances.

As a pilot project a survey instrument was developed and administered to a sample of sixty-eight business students. Thirty-five traditional undergraduate students and thirty-three non-traditional graduate students participated. The undergraduate class included twenty-five females and ten males. The graduate class included eighteen females and fifteen males. The respondents were classified by gender and education standing to analyze the responses.

The survey instrument included a series of eighteen items considered to be negotiation processes. Some items were direct market oriented questions such as the purchase price of a new home, or the purchase of jewelry first at an antique shop and then at a department store. Other items involved social contracts such as working on group projects or a marriage proposal. Several items were employment related such as starting salary for a job, work benefits, or work schedule. Each student was asked to identify those they considered a negotiation process.

Variables were created measuring the percentage of respondents choosing the item as a negotiation process for each of the four classifications (undergraduate female, undergraduate male, graduate female, and graduate male). Relationships between the four variables were then analyzed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for related variables. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test is a nonparametric alternative to a paired samples t-test. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test detects differences in the distributions of two related variables. The sum of the ranks for the less frequent sign is standardized. Small significance values indicate that the two variables differ in distribution. Four tests were run comparing gender by each class level and comparing class level by gender.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows some descriptive statistics from the survey. The percentage of each classification to consider an item to be a negotiation process is reported. On average undergraduate males were the most likely to select an item as a negotiation process 57.6% of the time. Graduate females were next, followed by graduate males and undergraduate females. However while the average responses are close the particular items that are considered negotiation processes varies by classification. For example, all graduate students and undergraduate males consider the determination of starting salary to be a negotiation. Only undergraduate males see the company benefits as an equally strong negotiation opportunity. The only item that undergraduate males are clearly less likely to see as negotiation is the issue of marriage proposals. To provide a careful comparison of the distribution produced by these responses a pair wise comparison is in order.

Negotiation Process?	G Pent F	G Pent M	U Pent F	U Pent M
Purchase of jewelry at an antique shop	94.4	60.0	56.00	63.64
Starting salary for a new job	94.4	86.7	68.00	81.82
Purchase price of house	94.4	93.3	84.00	81.82
Where to go for dinner	83.3	66.7	64.00	72.73
Raise at present job	83.3	53.3	56.00	90.91
Conflict with co-workers	72.2	53.3	64.00	63.64
Group projects	72.2	80.0	72.00	63.64
"Your place or mine"	66.7	60.0	48.00	72.73
Work schedule	66.7	73.3	60.00	72.73
Repair of house plumbing	50.0	26.7	20.00	45.45
Hotel accommodations	38.9	26.7	36.00	54.55
Discussion of a grade	33.3	40.0	24.00	27.27
Company benefits	33.3	40.0	48.00	81.82
Buying jewelry at a department store	27.8	13.3	28.00	36.36
Being stopped for speeding	27.8	40.0	40.00	36.36
Purchase of furniture at a national chain	27.8	13.3	24.00	54.55
Marriage proposal	16.7	20.0	16.00	0.00
Clothing purchase at department store	11.1	6.7	24.00	36.36
Average	55.2	47.4	46.2	57.6

Table 2 presents the signed rankings for the data analysis. The absolute differences between the variables are ranked and the ranks are split into three groups. Negative ranks contain those cases for which the value of the second variable exceeds the value of the first variable. For example in the first row there are only five instances where undergraduate females ranked an item as a negotiation process higher than undergraduate males. Positive ranks contain those cases for which the value of the first variable exceeds the value of the second variable. In thirteen cases undergraduate males placed a higher response on a negotiation process than females. Ties contain cases for which the two variables are equal. The undergraduate analysis by gender did not produce any ties.

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
U_M - U_F	Negative Ranks	5	5.10	25.50
	Positive Ranks	13	11.19	145.50
	Ties	0		
	Total	18		
G_F - G_M	Negative Ranks	6	6.25	37.50
	Positive Ranks	12	11.13	133.50
	Ties	0		
	Total	18		
G_F - U_F	Negative Ranks	4	8.75	35.00
	Positive Ranks	14	9.71	136.00
	Ties	0		
	Total	18		
G_M - U_M	Negative Ranks	11	11.45	126.00
	Positive Ranks	7	6.43	45.00
	Ties	0		
	Total	18		

The differences in recognition of negotiation processes are no doubt influenced by life experiences. The use of non-traditional graduate students provides some proxy for this. The pair wise comparison reveals that graduate females were more likely to think of items as a negotiation process than either undergraduate females or graduate males. Undergraduate males were more likely to think in terms of negotiation than either undergraduate males or graduate males. Thus in the transition between status as an undergraduate and a graduate the genders were moving in opposite directions. Males were becoming less likely to think in terms of negotiation

and females were becoming more likely. As a result the position of the genders reversed as shown in Chart 1.

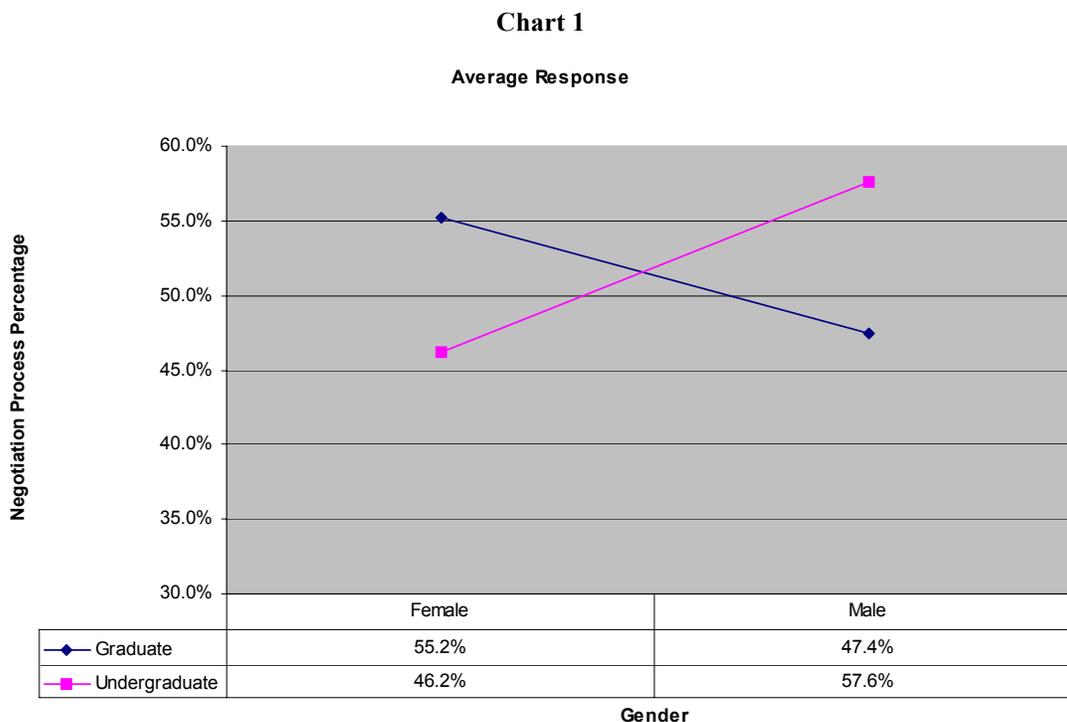


Table 3 reports the test statistics based upon the signed rankings of Table 2. The perceptions of negotiation processes discussed in Table 2 are significant when tested by gender and class status. The difference between undergraduate males and females is significant at the 99% level. The difference between graduate females and graduate males and the difference between graduate females and undergraduate females are both significant at the 95% level. The difference between graduate males and undergraduate males is significant at the 90% level. The graduate female is significantly more likely to view items as negotiation processes than either undergraduate females or graduate males. Similarly undergraduate males are significantly more likely to find negotiation processes than their female counterparts or graduate males. These findings lend support to the conclusion that negotiation research should control for negotiation recognition of the items considered.

	U_M - U_F	G_F - G_M	G_F - U_F	G_M - U_M
Z	-2.613(a)	-2.094(a)	-2.199(a)	-1.764(b)
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.036	.028	.078
a. Based on negative ranks.				
b. Based on positive ranks.				

### IMPORTANCE

This analysis has demonstrated that there are significant differences in whether different activities are recognized as a negotiation process. Significant differences were found by gender and class status. However, the cohort most likely to negotiate still faced items where they were dominated. Had the ordering been universal research on negotiation skills could use a simple control variable based on the complexity and ambiguity of the situation. Since the results demonstrate a non-transitive ordering of the appropriateness of negotiation, research on negotiation ability must control at the individual level for negotiation recognition as well as the underlying negotiation skill. The next stage of the research is validate an instrument to capture the negotiation recognition ability of the individual.

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# THE IMPERATIVE FOR TEACHING BUSINESS WRITING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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## ABSTRACT

*Will a discipline-specific writing test alert students to common conventional writing errors and motivate improvement? Two professors administered such a test comprised of 7 categories of writing errors to 96 students. There was a statistically significant difference in test scores for graduate students compared to undergraduate students. However, there was no significant difference in test scores related to when the test was administered in either the semester or a program of study. In subsequent writing assignments by 69 of the same students, 57% of undergraduates and 65% of graduate students continued to demonstrate trouble in most or all of the writing error categories. Conclusions include acknowledgment that writing is difficult and is a skill that must be both learned and practiced. The teaching of writing skills is also difficult and the problem is not easily remedied by raising awareness of writing errors at the individual instructor, assignment or course level. Recommendations and follow-up actions by these authors are provided.*

*Key words: education leadership, business writing, writing competency.*

## INTRODUCTION

This article is a description of a teaching tactic by two professors in an attempt to address business writing errors. The motivation was based on repeated observation of the same errors in online discussion postings, essay questions on exams, journal reviews, research projects and term papers across courses and time. Writing is defined herein as social versus business writing (Danet 2002). Social writing is casual ‘home talk’ and business writing is academic and professional ‘school talk’. School talk uses conventional writing rules in coursework and in the workplace (Nelson & Feinstein 2007) and is the subject of this article.

## BACKGROUND

The background information that follows has greatly assisted these authors, who are not writing experts, in understanding the context in which business students are making writing convention errors.

The Plain Language Movement in the 1970s set out to make bureaucratic language more comprehensible to laypersons. Documents became more speech-like, and schools moved from emphasis on conventional writing in favor of the message students wanted to express. Consequently, the focus of teaching shifted to a personal voice. At the time of The Movement, there was a generally held belief that the knowledge of grammar is ‘innate’ and will ‘shine through’ with practice (Nelson & Feinstein, 2007). However, knowledge of domain content must both exist and be practiced to become efficient (Willingham, 2007).

The 1993 National Commission on Excellence in Education reported that 17 year-olds did not possess the ‘higher-order intellectual skills’ needed to draw inferences from written material (Willingham, 2007). The 1999 National Association of Educational Progress noted most students scored at the basic writing level; and, the 2003 ACT National Curriculum Survey confirmed that half of college freshmen needed a remedial course to address the ‘muddled writing mess’ (Nelson & Feinstein, 2007). The new Millennials, defined by Gans 2007 as persons born between 1981 and 2000 and comprising 27.5% of the U.S. population, excel in technology utilization but tend to be weak in oral and written communications (Alsop, 2007). Traditional writing in standardized test scores for language assessment has decreased in recent years while math scores have unilaterally increased (Craig, 2003; Chaker, 2007).

The boundaries between social and business writing began blurring in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century due to preoccupation with function-related business communication; thus, the memo format and forfeiture of custom and courtesy in name of efficiency. The dividing line contains wide variation in punctuation; spelling; capitalization; graphic depictions for words; abbreviations; run-on sentences; and contractions (Danet, 2002).

### Technology Links

There are three kinds of literacy: oral, print and electracry with the latter defined as ‘fluency in the new digital media with the Internet being the fundamental element’ (Leibowitz, 1999, pp 4, 7). The Internet has become the dominant medium of both expression and communication and has changed the way the world communicates by combing speech and writing that escapes standard conventions of English. ‘Thoughts pour out with all the structure of a small child’s speech’. The emphasis is on speed resulting in a new language, Netspeak. Leaders of The Plain Language Movement did not anticipate that students daily practice their

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‘innate knowledge’ of writing, or the absence thereof, with their friends (Nelson & Feinstein, 2007).

Emails are unstructured streams-of-consciousness that Leibowitz (1999) described as ‘anal-expulsive’. People under age 25 see no need for manners in email, and most say they do not fret over trivialities such as punctuation, grammar and style. There is an assumption that conventions of writing are unnecessary on the Internet. However, while the speaking part of Netspeak does not require conventions, the writing part of online communications must still be organized (Nelson & Feinstein, 2007). The new medium invites informality and the informal style conflicts with traditional writing. Efficiency seems to have been the driver of email etiquette since one cannot type as fast as one can speak (Danet, 2002). Email is popular in the business setting since it is less intimidating than face-to-face or oral communication; however, the disadvantages are awkward editing and no retrieval once submitted (Merrier & Dirks, 1997).

Craig (2003, pp 119, 129) addresses the synchronous mode of instant messaging that requires the use of words but comprises a unique variant of English with no dictionary. The Internet, and the technology that has developed because of it, connect with a student’s natural tendency to be more comfortable in the oral literacy. Craig also notes that ‘we cannot stop a tide of change’; that the laxness of instant messaging is creeping into formal essays for credit; and, that there is fear the Internet is fostering shorter attention span, destroying the sentence and mangling diction.

Essays composed online are longer but no better written. There is a tendency to tinker endlessly with the conversational-type text and forget that the composition has a thesis. Students tend to write and never again look at words that have scrolled off the page; quality and quantity are in inverse order; and, a larger number of words are created without pruning to give texture and depth. These observations by Leibowitz (1999) agree with Merrier & Dirks (1997) who noted that about 40% of college students voice dislike for strict writing rules since they are too time-consuming and conflict with both the speed and ease components of the electronic communication age.

As a result of communication technology advances, there is no etiquette; students develop rules in journaling with friends. As a result, home talk and school talk are intertwined (Blasé, 2000). There is a high concentration of exchange that is non-personal and non-verbal, which block reliance on traditional verbal cues and body language to convey a message (Loeb, 2008). This new literacy is part of the tide of change.

Writing as a communication tool is rendered less important by Melville (2004) through advice to ‘write as little as possible’. Gomes (2007) makes the same observation related to PowerPoint presentations; people don’t like the ‘intellectual rigor’ of actually doing the work of writing a document from which the PowerPoint slides are derived. However, both neglect to emphasize that being brief or concise does not mean that grammar rules no longer apply. Therefore, readers of their articles can easily deduct that writing for academic credit,

professional writing in the workplace, and casual writing in emails and online social gatherings are all the same!

People traditionally curb behavior to conform to perceived expectations of the communication recipient according to Danet (2002). If this is true and students want to use conventional writing in business communication, Lewin's three-step change model should apply (Robbins, 2003). Conforming behavior begins with unfreezing an old behavior (sloppy writing), changing the behavior (learning and using conventional writing in the appropriate setting) and refreezing (retaining and exercising the new behavior). However, conforming behavior was not present in a study by Danet when students from various parts of the world used email to request copies of one of her published articles. Even though communicating with an unknown professor and making a formal request, the user identification was playful and formal writing styles were frequently mixed with informal. Dante pondered whether the students were 'showing off', non-native speakers of English, not well schooled in forms of business writing or schooled but struggling with writing difficulties. The implication is two fold: the medium invites informality even in the formal context and technology is converging with the cultural trend that has been drifting over three centuries in the 'oral communication' direction. When examining these findings using the Lewin theory, the stakes were evidently not high enough among even those students schooled in writing conventions to motivate their use.

Educated persons should be able to communicate successfully in oral and written form using good grammar, spelling and punctuation to create meaning, aid communication and link the writer and reader. However, social writing habits of online communication have 'seeped into school and writing on the Internet affects writing in class' (Nelson & Feinstein, 2007). For example, forgetfulness to use good grammar, spelling, and punctuation online could be leading students to forget to use them in school; or, writing on the Internet could be actually helping students become more aware of conventions but more lax in applying them. Hanson (2007) discusses an 'epidemic of ignorance' in elementary and secondary schools in proportion to the level of expenditures on education by state and federal governments. Only 69% of high school teachers cover sentence structure, writing strategy, organization, punctuation, style, grammar and usage of writing conventions (Nelson & Feinstein, 2007). And, the U. S. is not teaching as much English as evidenced by the fact that enrollment in English composition and grammar decreased 14% over the last decade. The 'English language is under attack' and Craig (2003) tends to blame the educational system rather than the technology.

### **Still Important**

Since the workplace is the future destination of students, are business schools graduating managers who know conventional writing rules? The basics are still key to jobs when developing training manuals; reports for external reviewers; grant proposals; service brochures; issue briefs;

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and memos to business contacts. Surveys of employers, recruiters and college alumni reveal that written communication is rated very important when selecting new employees (Matthews & Calongne, 2002). However, Flesher (2006) found that young professionals do not concur. When responding to electronic job postings, the use of funky fonts, distracting backgrounds, and quirky email addresses contribute to a negative first impression by perspective employers. In a study of students in two Midwestern universities, Merrier & Dirks (1997) found that students regarded oral over written communication as a more valuable career skill. Oral communication requires a shorter time period, and is less focused on the mechanical issues of writing. Therefore, oral communication more closely complies with the speed component of online communication.

The problem is international in scope. According to Lederman (2007), the world is a knowledge-based global economy and the core competencies that colleges teach should prepare students to function in that arena. However, Kuh (2007) observed that student writing is sub-par based on feedback from policy makers and business leaders. Hudak et al. (2000) suggest that the skill is a prerequisite for success equal in importance to quantitative skills, especially as managers move into senior positions.

Shewchuk et al. (2006) confirm that communication skills are essential for executives. They determined five clusters of management issues by asking managers and health administration program faculty to examine the effort of several professional bodies attempting to establish standard management behavior competencies. Communication competency was a first priority for the administrators and the second priority for program faculty. White & Begun (2006) derived a similar importance of written communication skills among surveyed internship preceptors and employers of health administration graduates.

The stakes rise when poor written communication skills are linked to reading and thinking. Americans of both genders read infrequently and poorly, and the decline is linked to weaker performance in school (Gioia & Starr, 2007; Weiner, 2007). Leibowitz (1999, p 4) observed that 'good writers must be good readers and students glued to the computer screen tend to read more casually; generate quick and casual prose; and avoid entering deeply into either syntax or the ideas of an article being read'. Craig (2003, pg 117) agrees since students 'read more casually and such habits produce quickly generated casual prose'. This deficiency shows up in the inability to 'read an article and make sense of a complex body of material' (Scholes et al., 2001, p 321).

'Writing is the practical medium for thinking and self expression' and 'good thinking is reflected in good writing' (Nelson & Feinstein, 2007, p 4). When writing conventions are not followed, writers are 'everywhere since everywhere is where the Internet reaches'. Poor writing strips down the English language and is bad mannered. The black/white, two-dimensional space requires editing, revising and viewing content, form and conventions as inseparable. Korkki (2007) adds that nearly half of executives say that entry level workers not only lack writing skills, but 27% of them are deficient in critical thinking; and, the quality of writing and thinking

by workers is ‘equivalent to wearing flip-flops’ on the job. These findings are in keeping with Leibowitz (1999, p 5) in that writing is integral to critical thinking since ‘precise thinking’ leads to the ‘ability to articulate what one knows’.

## METHOD

While it appears that students keep current with communication technology, they do not appear to view social writing and business writing as different; do not regard writing as a skill that needs to be practiced; do not appreciate writing as a learned skill rather than endowed at birth; or, do not understand that writing is an indicator of how one reads or thinks.

The premise for this article is that writing skills are not specialized functions, but part of daily life of a business student or professional. It is about a teaching tool designed to alert students to writing errors that cost valuable points in subsequent written assignments. Ninety-six students, including 47 undergraduates and 49 graduates, completed a discipline-specific writing test that spanned six courses in two semesters in 2006.

The tool was a writing test containing 7 categories of writing errors:

- ◆ *sentence structure (order, flow, and selection of words to convey a message);*
- ◆ *first and second person (instead of third person);*
- ◆ *tense (nouns with verbs and nouns with reference pronouns);*
- ◆ *punctuation (commas and semicolons);*
- ◆ *capitalization (proper names);*
- ◆ *acronyms (not defined first time used); and*
- ◆ *parenthetical citation (components missing such as year or page number of direct quote).*

A 20-item writing test was developed from scratch and was based on reoccurring types of errors in an established business course. Verbatim writing error samples were collected over three previous semesters from 50 graduate and undergraduate research papers. The Director of the Learning Center and the Coordinator of writing instructors for freshmen attested that both the error categories and questions were typical and representative. Members of one of the business school advisory committees also confirmed that both the categories and questions were representative and prevalent in the workplace. Merrier & Dirks (1997) and Danet (2002) provide validation of the error categories. No psychometric analysis was performed on the teaching tool beyond face validity and evaluation by academic peers and workplace representatives.

The test was piloted as an un-graded assignment in the business course of origin. The same professor graded all tests and subsequent writing assignments used to assess any improvement in writing skills in the selected courses. All students received the same set of

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instructions and the same amount of time to complete the test. Each test item was worth 5 points for a total grade of 100. The instructions required students to identify the type of writing error and correct the error. Partial credit was given for achieving any part of the two objectives.

The test was administered to 74 students in the first learning module of 5 courses to alert them to errors requiring attention to avoid grade point loss in subsequent writing assignments. Twenty-two other students were later tested in the last module of a sixth course to assess the impact of timing of test administration on test scores. There was no pre and post testing. All tests were administered during the 2006 academic year. .

Tests were returned to students during course participation with individualized emphasis on the writing areas requiring concentrated effort for improvement. To draw meaning from the whole experience, all completed tests were retrospectively examined to address the following questions:

*How do the writing skills of undergraduate students compare to those of graduate students? Are the mean scores of the two groups significantly different?*

*Does feedback on writing errors result in changed writing habits? Do scores of students completing the test early in a semester differ significantly from scores of students completing the test late in the semester? In other words, does the timing of a writing test in a semester matter?*

*Do scores of students completing the test in courses offered early in the program of study differ significantly from scores of students completing the test in courses offered at the end of the program of study? In other words, does the timing of a writing test in a program of study matter?*

Writing test scores were compared using measures of central tendency and non-paired, two-tailed t-test. Equal variances could not be assumed among the data groupings based on Levene's Test for Equality of Variances. T-tests are interpreted and degrees of freedom are reported accordingly. Therefore, the analysis of findings is descriptive.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Comparison of Graduate and Undergraduate Students**

The difference in mean scores of these two groups (undergraduate group mean 53.2553 versus graduate group mean of 64.3980 with  $t = -3.804$ ,  $df = 87.964$ ,  $p = .000$ ) was statistically

significant. Contributing factors include significant difference in 10 of the 20 items in 5 of the 7 error categories: sentence structure, tense, capitalization, acronyms and citations.

Potential explanation for the significant difference in mean test scores for undergraduate and graduate students includes an older average age, a higher level of self-selection by graduate students to return to school, and more practice with writing related to longer periods of study. Based on the low mean scores for both groups, one could reason that some of these students did not possess writing skills; those who possessed the skills believed they were not important enough to matter; or, they exercised bad writing habits based on cultural writing norms (Leibowitz, 1999; Blasé, 2000; Danet, 2002; Craig, 2003).

### **Comparison of Undergraduate Subgroups Related to Time Test Administered During the Semester**

Undergraduates in one course completed the writing test in the last learning module of the semester; whereas, undergraduates in two other courses completed the writing test in the first learning module of the semester. The difference in mean test scores of the two undergraduate groups was not statistically significant with an early-in-semester group mean of 56.9000 versus a late-in-semester group mean of 49.1136 ( $t = 1.731$ ,  $df = 44.961$ ,  $p = .090$ ). However, testing early in the semester was significant in 6 of 20 items in 4 of the 7 error categories: sentence structure, tense, capitalization and citations.

Potential explanation for the lack of significant difference in mean test scores for undergraduates completing the test early versus late in the semester includes the fact that student motivation might have been low among the late-in-semester group as no subsequent assignments were impacted by the test; or, the test did not carry enough weight in the overall course grading scheme of any of the courses to be considered important related to effort expended in either group. These findings align with Danet (2002) when stakes are not high enough to influence writing behavior.

### **Comparison of Graduate Subgroups Related to Time Test Administered During Program of Study**

Graduate students typically complete the health policy course in the first semester of a program of study and the strategic management course just prior to graduation. The difference in mean test scores for these two graduate subgroups was not statistically significant with an early-in-program group mean of 60.1500 versus a late-in-program group mean of 66.8452 ( $t = 1.630$ ,  $df = 30$ ,  $p = .114$ ). However, students completing the test just prior to graduation demonstrated statistically significant improvement over those completing the test early in the

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program in 7 of 20 items in 4 of the 7 writing error categories: sentence structure, first/second person, tense and citations.

Potential explanation for the lack of significant difference in mean test scores for graduate students completing the test early versus late in the program of study includes the fact that both courses were taught by the same professor, the writing feedback process was the same for both courses, and each course offered opportunities to revise writing assignments to improve the grade. The students could have been simply relying on the professor to repeatedly alert them to the errors that needed correction rather than learning and applying a new skill.

### **Comparison of Performance in Subsequent Writing Assignments by Subgroup of Sample Students**

Subsequent writing assignments were retrospectively assessed for 69 of the sample 74 students who completed the test early in the semester. The objective was to retrospectively assess the types and extent of errors still problematic and determine if early exposure to the test and emphasis on the importance of writing skills had any long-term impact (defined as the semester). Examined assignments included journal reviews of 1-3 pages as well as research papers of 20-30 pages for which grade points had been deducted during the semester for one or more of the 7 error categories.

In two undergraduate courses for which subsequent writing assignments were available from 23 students, 10 (43%) continued to demonstrate writing errors in at least one test category. However, the remaining 13 students (57 %) continued to demonstrate all or most of the 7 error types primarily in the categories of sentence structure, first/second person and punctuation. After the writing test, professor feedback was provided throughout the semester on each writing assignment but did not prove fruitful for 57% of the students in the undergraduate subgroup.

In the three graduate courses for which subsequent writing assignments were available from 46 students, 16 (35%) students continued to demonstrate writing errors in at least one category. The remaining 30 students (65%) continued to demonstrate all or most of the error types primarily in the categories of sentence structure, first and second person, punctuation, and citations. In two of the courses, writing assignments were submitted in stages for extensive professor feedback with an opportunity to make corrections. Students in these two courses with professor assignment review and feedback did not perform any better than those in the third graduate course without such extensive professor interaction. Professor feedback after the writing test and during the semester combined with the option to resubmit the assignment did not prove fruitful for 65% of the students in the graduate subgroup.

All of the error types continued to be troubling in subsequent assignments for a majority of both undergraduate and graduate students in the subgroup. Early warning on common errors and practice during the semester did not correct the errors in 57% of undergraduate and 65% of

graduate students. These findings align with the observation by Willingham (2007) that students need to possess a domain of knowledge about writing before practice can improve performance. They also align with the observation by Nelson & Feinstein (2007) that knowledge of writing conventions is not 'innate' and practice perpetuates bad writing habits as well as good ones; however, these findings conflict with their further observation that discipline specific feedback represents writing for the situation in which content, form and conventions are inseparable.

In keeping with Blasé (2000) related to explicit expectations for a written assignment, the test instructions and course designs in which the test was administered included several components: an alert that the presence of the test implies writing skills are important; identification of the types of common errors that result in grade point loss; writing expectations for subsequent writing assignments during the semester; plans for ongoing professor review, and the opportunity to revise. However, these efforts did not correct writing problems in the majority of graduate or undergraduate students in the sample. Therefore, professor feedback in 5 of the 6 courses did not create a new behavior; and, opportunities to revise and resubmit did not yield substantial writing improvement. The level of skill improvement in this study was marginal related to the time consumption on the part of the professor providing the feedback.

The fact that the writing assignment for students in the sample within one graduate course involved a business plan for a real project in a real organization did not result in writing at any higher level than for writing assignments based on conceptual topics in the other 5 courses. Therefore, high stakes writing did not carry sufficient weight to alter writing behavior. This finding is contrary to an assertion by Craig (2003) that students have the capacity to maintain distinct and no-agreeing literacies. It is also contrary to the assumption that people curb behavior in accordance with standards of an expectant communication recipient (Danet, 2003). However, expectations without necessary knowledge do not facilitate switching gears between casual and business writing (Nelson & Feinstein, 2007).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO FACULTY**

Educational programs reside in an industry system in which they both influence and are influenced by the larger external environment (Longest et al., 2004). White (2005, p 326) adds the following advice borrowed from Deming: 'problems exist in a system and the system belongs to management'-in this case faculty.

### **Take a Systems Approach**

Develop a consensus on writing skills to be taught and assessed (Griffith, 2007). Determine the extent to which a competency gap exists; if and how writing competency will be addressed in admission criteria, and how the criteria will be used to steer students into remedial

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resources. Make a policy decision as to which faculty, courses and method of learning assessment should be demonstrating improvement in written communication skills. Determine if instruction will be left in the hands of expert writing teachers with writing intensive courses for credit within the disciplines. If so, those experts could guide the entire faculty in designing assignments around the writing skill areas that require concentrated effort. Alternatively, template writing instructions could be prepared by the experts to provide consistency in writing assignment expectations, reduce confusion among students due to variability among faculty, and convey the message that writing skills are an important indicator of academic achievement. According to White (2005), writing skills of faculty may require attention. Other approaches might include creating a minimum set of writing standards and piloting them with all faculty in one discipline; using writing competency rubrics in the learning assessment program to track results; addressing the extent of faculty consensus on one common writing style guide; or, using each exposure to students to emphasize the importance of writing (examples include student orientation and registration).

### **Teach Writing Conventions**

Assume no preparation by students coming into courses requiring written communication skills (Merrier & Dirks, 1997; Korkki, 2007). Continue teaching writing conventions since students must continue to learn about their own language (Nelson & Feinstein, 2007). Do not leave writing conventions to chance and recognize that conventional and technology-assisted writing worlds can co-exist but remain separate based on setting and writing purpose. Willington (2007) recommends that faculty provide both the domain knowledge and practice. Craig (2003) encourages the teaching of writing conventions since the ability does not develop spontaneously. He notes that regression in literacy stems only from inattention to it and contends that instant messaging serves as a good example of a literacy used in wrong settings because scholarly literacy has not been addressed well enough. Teach discrimination in matching voice to setting. Hudak et al. (2000) even suggest individually tailored instruction. While writing tools change, teach what will not change – the connection between critical thinking and critical writing (Leibowitz, 1999).

### **Make Expectations Explicit**

Convey an early message about how students will have to write in a program of study as an indicator of expectations in the professional world (Leibowitz, 1999). Spend time in each course on expected skills that relate to good writing (Criag, 2003). Be explicit with expectations on the quality required (Blasé, 2000). Do not allow bad social writing habits to seep into coursework and stop fostering an ignorance that is not easily undone. For example, do not allow

smileys and emoticons to replace semicolons and dashes (Nelson & Feinstein, 2007). Establish measures of student compliance with minimum skill expectations well before graduation. Examples: minimum GMAT essay score for graduate students; designated writing level for undergraduates and a higher level for graduate students; and expected reading level by graduation.

### **Provide Student Feedback**

According to Alsop (2007), the New Millennials are socialized to get constant feedback and are going to look for it. Therefore, provide feedback on writing skills, just like the much-desired feedback on oral communication, in an effort to convey a message that writing is a valuable career skill (Merrier & Dirks, 1997). For example, students will work harder when they know the professor and classmates will not only read but respond to their work (Leibowitz, 1999). Nelson & Fienstein (2007) found in a study of teachers that many writing errors are not caught or marked and speculated that there could be a sense of apathy or, worse yet, an ignorance of standard conventions on the part of teachers. At a minimum, Leibowitz (1999) suggests isolating every problem in at least the first writing assignment in a course and requiring a second draft.

### **Gear to the Marketplace**

Seek council of the school or program advisory committees. Adapt the content and method of instruction on written communication competency to the marketplace before assessment is mandated at higher education levels by government (Traub, 2007). Evaluate the ability of the program to meet current needs of students and assure program graduates possess the right knowledge, skills and attributes to function in the marketplace (White & Begun, 2006; Campbell et al., 2006; Griffith, 2006; Anderson et al., 2000).

### **Prepare to Go Public**

Expect to make student performance public as part of a larger response to a call from policymakers and business leaders (Kuh, 2007). Be aware that the spotlight is on education by the Senate as to whether colleges and universities are abusing public trust and whether the level of effort put forth by faculty is preparing students to be democratic citizens (Delbanco, 2007). Traub (2007) adds that the No Child Left Behind campaign is expanding into colleges by recommending that they should measure and report meaningful student learning outcomes as a condition of accreditation. This leads to shaping a program identity around learning outcomes with the goal of broad competencies that span disciplines including citizenship, communication,

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creatively, critical thinking, ethical practice and science gained through assignments. Note that this paper has referenced two of these competencies: communication and thinking.

### **Think Bigger than the Course, the School or the University**

Be aware that the debate about learning outcomes is not merely an American phenomenon. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development is discussing the use of learning outcome measures in colleges across the globe to determine their contributions to the tertiary education of society (Lederman, 2007).

Kuh (2007) provides good summary advice. All these efforts will not in every case make up for inadequate academic preparation in elementary and secondary schools and the fact that young, less experienced students assume they can be serious and playful at the same time. They are not likely to migrate toward traditional writing on their own as they mature.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO STUDENTS**

The trend toward communication informality is believed by students to be perfectly acceptable in all settings (Danet, 2002). However, the writers of this article hold that sloppy writing can be interpreted as sloppy work performance. For example, incomplete sentences, abbreviations, and casual overall manner do not reflect a professional demeanor (Flesher, 2007).

### **Know Consequences**

Based on a string of insider trading scandals in which people got ‘busted’ by their own writing habits, Melville (2004) admonishes students to get ‘un-lax’, and to not assume that ignorance is a good defense. He suggests that all writing should be performed as if a licensing body is standing over one’s shoulder. Loeb (2008) agrees in the context of selecting the best method of communicating a message and the best way to express an intended message.

### **Leave Home Talk at Home**

To succeed in society, Nelson & Feinstein (2007) admonish students to learn how to easily switch from ‘home talk’ to ‘school talk’ and to apply traditional writing conventions to all situations. They also suggest asking two questions regardless of the arena in which writing occurs: Will my reader(s) understand what I am trying to communicate? Is my writing reflecting my best thinking? Therefore, know when to use conventional writing skills. Leave the culturally acceptable but nonprofessional writing at home. View coursework as a precursor to developing

a professional persona for advancement in the workplace. Prove Craig (2003) correct in his assumption that humans have the capacity to maintain distinct and non-agreeing literacies.

### **Learn Conventions**

Learn how to write in Standard English, similar to the concept of dressing to fit the occasion (Nelson & Feinstein, 2007). Spell words correctly and fully (Korkki, 2007). Before accessing Goggle and Yahoo, become familiar with and use the writing resources available at any college. Secure and use a writing guide.

### **Practice**

The practice of writing is analogous to the practice of tennis- ‘only you can do it’ (Scholes et al., 2001, p14). Practice can lead toward better performance; using correct grammar is never out of style (Merrier & Dirks, 1997). Rather than write the first draft of a paper on the computer, actually think before placing words on a page with a pen. Proofread in paper form since all one can see on a computer are the words visible through the keyhole of the screen (Leibowitz, 1999).

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

To what extent do business students regard written communication important to their future professions? A survey of students at periodic intervals in a program of study could reveal how the teaching of conventional writing is received in the context of a career path preparation.

Do employers actually communicate the expectation that workers come to the job with writing skills? Job analysis could reveal the extent to which expectations and remedial alternatives are reflected in job descriptions. If such indicators do not exist, to what extent are business executives starting to appoint and rely on a writing specialist to critique all written communication for internal as well as external customers?

Would workshops conducted in the workplace on written communication skills close the competency gap among managers? Each could be customized for a workplace by university faculty who are experts in written communication to alert managers about domain knowledge, common errors, and practice.

How can the tide of social writing in the digital age be addressed more aggressively? Collaborative research with high schools and colleges from which business programs derive enrollment could begin a movement to balance events that created the tide of change in the first place.

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Will acquired written communication skills be sustained as students progress through a program of study and move into the workplace? The writing (and reading) level of a student cohort could be tracked throughout the duration of program enrollment and into the workplace.

How will written communication be impacted by the proliferation of course delivery through web-based distance learning modalities in which writing assignments comprise most of the coursework? How will faculty for whom English is not a first language cope?

### **FOLLOW UP**

The literature review for this article confirms that errors in business writing are widespread. The experience with a sample of 96 students demonstrates how time consuming and frustrating it can be for faculty who are diverted by recurring conventional writing errors when trying to focus on the content of a writing assignment. This circumstance is worsened when discipline-specific faculty are not writing experts.

While a university-wide approach to measure and intervene in writing conventions errors is under development, these authors took and continue to take the actions described below.

The findings of the experience with the 96 sample students were presented to both the university-wide assessment committee and to the business school faculty. The matter is currently being addressed through the business school's learning assurance program. A learning outcome for writing was developed and is being measured in selected courses. A writing rubric contains a component on use of writing conventions and the rubric is included in the syllabus material. Samples of well written papers and business plans are made available for student reference early in the applicable courses.

These authors continue to deduct grade points for repeated writing convention errors; to coach students with feedback on all writing assignments and to provide opportunity to revise and resubmit to improve the assignment grade.

These authors also alerted the university's Learning Center to expect more referrals for remedial intervention related to writing. As a result, the Coordinator of composition instructors for freshmen and the Director of the Learning Center administered both a reading test and a writing test to a group of business students in spring 2008 as a pilot for administering the tests to a broader base of students. Discussions are underway related to administering them as part of orientation for upper division/transfer undergraduates as well as graduate students, beginning with the School of Business.

### **CONCLUSION**

Is writing important? The answer is 'no' for most of the students described in this paper, who are among those replacing all forms of written communication with pictures and text

messaging. However, the answer is ‘yes’ among business school business school faculty and advisory committee members.

Writing is difficult and a skill that must be not only learned but practiced. If the subjects in this article are representative of students everywhere, writing skills are weak and the problem is widespread. Students should not only understand how technology is changing writing requirements but also understand that conventional business writing skills will continue to be integral to professional performance, achievement and success.

The teaching of writing skills is also difficult in light of the change in focus to math skills in the 1970s and the proliferation of Internet-based technologies that confuses social with business writing. As more and more communication takes place in written form through the use of virtual offices and web-based information exchange, the gap between the existing versus needed levels of writing skills become more apparent. Without a good foundation in writing, a few scattered efforts in a few courses by a few professors over a few semesters, as described in this article, will not have more than a marginal impact on correction of the problem. These meager efforts cannot stem the tide of social writing in the digital age.

Business schools teach current and future managers. Consequently, business writing/school talk is foundational to such teaching as writing is the primary tool in all forms of communication other than oral and sign language. The stakes are high. If students continue sloppy writing habits, the outcomes could be expressed in lower reading levels, lower critical thinking levels and lower learning achievement scores (Chaker, 2007).

*‘Written communication is a staple in our ever-connected digital world’.*

Nelson & Fienstein (2007, p 20)

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# WHEN POWER HAS LEADERS: SOME INDICATORS OF POWER-ADDICTION AMONG ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERS

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper examines some potentially addictive properties of power and the outcomes of power-addiction on leaders' behaviors. The concept of power-addiction has been discussed in popular media for centuries but its acknowledgement among organizational researchers is relatively recent. We build upon research from the helping professions to highlight the mutually reinforcing relationship between addiction and denial. Next, we discuss how some leaders may be susceptible to power's addictive properties and concurrently in denial about their power-addiction. Adapting a framework of denial from Kearney (1996), we illustrate how two former CEOs' behaviors and quotes may reflect denial and potential power-addiction. We discuss of the implications of our research for both academics and practitioners involved in leadership and the study of organizations, and conclude by describing some challenges related to examining and applying denial in organizational settings.*

## INTRODUCTION

Power is the currency of leadership. Academics and non-academics alike have long acknowledged that leaders need and use power in order to help an organization accomplish its goals (Kets de Vries, 1999; Tanoff & Barlow, 2002). Correspondingly, the organizational literature on power – specifically, leaders' accumulation and use of it – is of significant breadth and depth (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Scholars have paid far less attention to the effects of power on leaders, i.e., the ways in which different/various properties of power influence leaders' patterns of thinking and behavior (Kets de Vries' influential body of work on dysfunctional leadership is an exception). In this article, we argue that not all of the effects of power on leaders are positive, and that some of those effects may be highly counterproductive. We believe such a line of inquiry is important since leaders have a disproportionate effect on organizations and, by extension, on society.

The purpose of this paper is to explore leaders' behaviors when, instead of the leader having control over power, power has control over the leader. To accomplish this, we first discuss some properties of power that make it potentially addictive. Next, building upon work in the helping professions and other fields, we demonstrate the interrelatedness of addiction and denial. While many leaders wield power without either its obsessive accumulation or abuse, we describe how some leaders are vulnerable to the addictive properties of power and predisposed to deny this power-addiction. We present two organizational illustrations demonstrating how CEO's behaviors and quotes can be a reflection of their being in denial. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our research for both academics and practitioners who are involved in leadership and the study of organizations.

### **POWER, ADDICTION, AND DENIAL**

Leaders, and their pivotal roles in the sustained health and functioning of organizations, have been the impetus for decades of research on leadership traits and behaviors (Avolio & Yammarino, 2002; Coutu, 2004; Kets de Vries, 1999). Some authors have emphasized leaders' influence on organizations' success (Kotter, 1990; House & Aditya, 1997) while others have explored leaders' roles in organizational crises or failures (Heifetz, 2004; Kets de Vries, 1991, 2001). In this article, we build on the belief that leaders may be especially vulnerable to the addictive properties of power derived from their formal positions in organizations (Kets de Vries, 2001, 2004). Next, we briefly discuss the nature of power in the context of organizational leadership, and the relationship between addiction and denial.

#### **Power and Leaders**

Power has been defined as, "...influence by one person over others, stemming from a position in an organization, from an interpersonal relationship, or from an individual characteristic." (Ragins & Sundstorm, 1989: 51). Power has many faces and has been classified as perceived or objective power (Kaplowitz, 1978), or as positional, interpersonal or individual power depending on its source (Peiro & Melia, 2003; Ragins & Sundstorm, 1989). Power, and its multiple facets, have been discussed in popular media and have been the focus of much academic research (Hollander & Offermann, 1990).

Kets de Vries (1991) believes that authors as early as Plato were cognizant of power's addictive properties and of its potential to corrupt leaders. Today there is growing awareness that addictive behaviors are not restricted to drugs such as alcohol, nicotine, or narcotics (Breton & Largent, 1996; Kets de Vries, 1991, 2004; Trivedi, 2004). Addictive behaviors may also occur in response to processes like perfectionism, *getting and holding on to power*, gambling, sex, and even thrill-seeking (Breton & Largent, 1996; Keohane, 2005; Kets de Vries, 1991).

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Not all powerful leaders become addicted to power, however, Fidel Castro (The Economist, 1999), George W. Bush (van Wormer, 2002), and David Duke (Heifetz, 2004) are but a few examples of leaders who have been described in popular and academic writing as being individuals addicted to power. Power-addiction and denial may also afflict entire organizations (examples described by Keohane (2005) include the Roman Catholic Church and Al Qaeda; and Roy (2002) discusses the political governance of countries like India and the US as examples). If power has addictive properties, it seems logical that applying knowledge about addiction and addictive behaviors can be of help to organizations.

### **Addiction and Denial**

Dependence is a defining characteristic of addiction, which may be best explained as an individual's loss of rationality (Trimpey, 1996) with regard to specific substances (APA, 1987) or processes (Breton & Largent, 1996; Kets de Vries, 1991; Trivedi, 2004). Literature from a number of helping professions – including, but not limited to social workers, addiction therapists, grief counselors, and family therapists – amply demonstrates that addiction is not a solitary process, but that denial always goes hand-in-hand with addiction (Kearney, 1996; Lobsinger, 1997). Writing from extensive experience as an addiction counselor, Kearney (1996) defined denial as a psychological process people use to protect themselves from psychological threats. For people with addictions, denial suppresses admission of their addiction, its costs, and its consequences, any of which represent a serious psychological threat. He emphasized that denial and addiction are mutually enabling processes: denial defends the addiction, while addiction fuels the denial.

Denial is a prevalent clinical concept (Robak, 1991; van Wormer, 1986) that is consistently defined across fields of study and practice (Whiteacre, 2004) and is widely understood in American popular culture. Alcoholics Anonymous has played a significant role in American society's increasing acceptance of "twelve-step" programs, defining alcoholism as an illness, and the recognition of the importance of confronting denial as a first step in the addiction recovery process (Kurtz, 1979). The best evidence of the extensive dissemination of denial as a lay concept is Kiechel and Sampson's (1993: 163) observation that, "You know an idea has arrived when it provides the punch line to a country-western hit. .... "Just call me Cleopatra," Pam Tillis sings, "cause I'm the queen of denial."

In contrast to the helping professions and popular culture, addiction and denial has received only peripheral interest in academic literature on organizations. The result is a popular construct that remains conceptually underdeveloped and empirically under-explored among organizational researchers (Weidner & Purohit, 2003). Studying power-addiction and denial in organizations will address this research gap. In the next section we discuss how, instead of the leader possessing power, power may possess the leader.

## THE EFFECTS OF POWER ON LEADERS

Many leaders use legitimate or formal power effectively and ethically in fulfilling their organizational and social responsibilities (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Such leaders are “independent” of their position power and often have little difficulty relinquishing that power at the end of their tenure (Senge, 2002). On the other hand, leaders who succumb to power’s addictive properties are likely to excessively engage in: (a) the accumulation of more power, and/or (b) the abuse of power. Leaders who resort to political behaviors that involve the use of their organizational position and/or resources for unsanctioned means or ends may be demonstrating symptoms of power-addiction (Murray & Gandz, 1980).

Several researchers have proposed ideas about why and when, instead of leaders having power, power has the leaders. Mulder’s (1977) power distance theory proposed that since power is such a scarce commodity in organizations (or societies), possessing power is very attractive to individuals. Consequently, those people with more power will work to protect their privileged positions and those with less power will strive to acquire more (Mulder, 1977). Further, Mulder (1977) proposed that a person’s efforts to protect their power are directly proportional to the power distance existing between themselves and others. Specifically, if the power distance between a manager and his/her employee is nominal, the manager will not exert much effort to maintain that power distance.

Bepko (1991) and Kets de Vries (1991) both added the element of addiction to Mulder’s power distance theory. Bepko (1991) hypothesized that unequal power relationships contributed to promoting and supporting addictive behaviors. Therefore, leaders with significantly greater power would be predisposed to becoming addicted to their power. Kets de Vries (1991) added a rich theoretical rationale to the addictive nature of power by explaining that psychological processes such as transference, mirroring, aging, and fear of retaliation were all involved in perpetuating power addiction.

Given that power can be addictive and that denial is an integrant part of addiction, the denial associated with a leader’s power-addiction – combined with hierarchical differences in power found in organizations – increases the likelihood that a leader’s power-addiction can become a hidden or “silent” organizational illness or threat. The organizational risks associated with a power-addicted leader make it imperative that we better understand denial. As Kearney (1996) observed, working with denial is essential to overcoming addictive behaviors. In the following sections we describe Kearney’s (1996) clinical model of denial to demonstrate that it can be used to understand power-addicted leaders, and present two examples of power-addicted leaders and identify their denial responses.

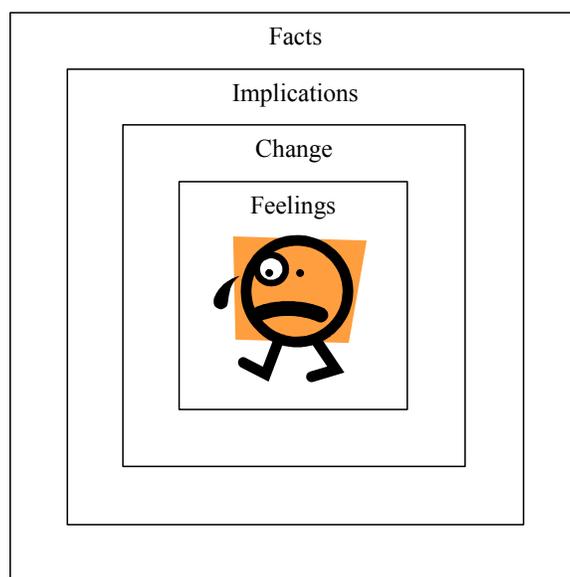
## KEARNEY'S FOUR-LEVEL MODEL OF DENIAL

To place denial in the context of organizations and organizational leadership, at the minimum we need a working definition as a jumping-off point for our discussion. We have adapted Kearney's (1996) description of denial as follows:

*Denial in organizational leaders can be used as a general term for cognitive and behavioral protective processes leaders use to shelter themselves from the impact of powerful, frightening, or life changing truths related to the organization and/or their role in it. (p. 8)*

Kearney (1996: 1-2 emphasis in the original) described denial as "...a form of self-protection. It is a *psychological* process people use to protect themselves from *psychological* threat. It is a wall, a barrier, a shelter from fright." Kearney (1996) argues that people combating addiction use four concentric layers of self-protection that serve as walls of denial surrounding the individual. From the outermost to innermost, these layers are: denial of facts, denial of implications, denial of change, and denial of feelings. Figure 1 illustrates our adaptation of Kearney's original figure of concentric, protective denial layers.

**Figure: Kearney's Framework From *Within the Wall of Denial***



Adapted from Kearney (1996, p. 13).

### **Denial of Facts**

Kearney believes that this outermost layer of denial is the most frequently used, and helps individuals in denial from consciously diverting attention away from anything that is unpleasant. According to Kearney, denial of facts involves selective perception and admission of data to block out objective information. This layer of denial is often the first response elicited in confrontations of any kind and may involve the simple - often instinctual - negation of any facts. The addicted individual may simply deny facts with the conscious purpose of stopping any criticism and/or protecting their way as the “right way.” Individuals in this layer of denial may express themselves vehemently, consciously engage in bullying, and be disarming or even charming as they deny facts.

### **Denial of Implications**

According to Kearney, when a fact becomes irrefutable or well established, the individual in denial moves deeper into the second layer of defense and self-protection. Individuals at this layer minimize the implications of their behaviors. Their minimization may concern the kind (“I only smoke pot”), amount (“I only had 3 highballs”), frequency (“I only drink on weekends”), or seriousness (“I can still drive, I have never had a DUI”) of their behavior. These individuals have a hard time accepting the diagnosis of their condition as addiction. Once a diagnosis of addiction has been made, it becomes part of the body of facts that the denial system is designed to hide from self and others.

### **Denial of Change**

Sometimes individuals in denial cannot refute facts or implications because these objective pieces of data may have successfully penetrated the first two concentric rings of self-protective denial. At the third layer of defense, individuals deny the need for change in their lives, and shirk any personal responsibility for making those changes. The person operating at this layer of denial resists the idea that he or she is responsible for his/her actions or inactions. If the consequences are unavoidable, the person in denial will claim that the situation is not their fault, that he or she didn’t do it on purpose. The consequences of both inaction and action are distorted in denial of change. “Why should I apologize? What’s the big deal? I was just a little high, nobody got hurt. Forget it.” (Kearney, 1996: 19). Counselors working with individuals in addiction often find that these clients’ recovery is delayed or sabotaged when they defend themselves with an elaborate system of excuses found at this level. Addicted individuals may try to make others responsible for their recovery steps. They may expect their spouses to drive them

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to their meetings or appointments - they have excuses for everything when they are at this level of denial.

### **Denial of Feelings**

The final layer of denial is the exclusion of feelings from awareness. This level differs from those preceding as it is wholly outside the addicted individual's awareness or consciousness. Denial of change will shutoff ideas, memories, or even consciousness itself. This layer protects years of self-doubts, shame, remorse for years of abuse, and the secrets of the soul (Barfield, 1979; Kearney, 1996). At this layer addicts are protecting themselves from feelings that are too strong. It can take individuals a long time to get in touch with their feelings, become articulate about them, and engage the internal conflicts that surround them.

## **ILLUSTRATIONS OF POWER-ADDICTED LEADERS AND DENIAL**

In this section, we examine selected public statements of two corporate chief executives that seem to illustrate all four layers of denial described earlier. The first leader is Bernard Ebbers, former CEO of WorldCom, who was convicted of accounting fraud and sentenced to 25 years in prison for his role in the largest corporate bankruptcy in history. Ebbers' denial concerned the financial viability of WorldCom, and his own ethical conduct (Larson, 2002). The second leader is Carly Fiorina, former CEO of Hewlett-Packard, who executed a merger with Compaq. In contrast to Ebbers, we make no suggestion that Fiorina engaged in any unethical conduct; instead, she has been criticized more for her execution ability and for her lack of attention to HP's vaunted organizational culture (Kanellos, 2005). We provide a brief background of each leader and their organization. Next, we present in tabular form, each CEO's specific quotes reflecting Kearney's (1996) four layers of denial.

### **Bernard "Bernie" Ebbers and WorldCom**

WorldCom, a business empire built by a self-made billionaire Bernard J. Ebbers, entered the halls of infamy in 2002 when it filed for the world's largest corporate bankruptcy. Ebbers started Long Distance Discount Service (LDDS), a Mississippi reseller of long-distance service, with a group of co-founders in 1983. In 1995 LDDS changed its name to WorldCom Inc. with Ebbers as CEO. Between 1995 and 2000, WorldCom bought more than sixty additional companies, often funded by its own soaring share price, including a merger worth \$37 billion with MCI in 1997 (Wolk, 2005).

Throughout this period, Ebbers accumulated a sizeable collection of personal assets and other businesses including stakes in timber property, a trucking firm, a lumber company, a golf

course, a marina, a hotel, and other real estate. He personally owned Canada's largest cattle ranch, a huge yacht, and a minor-league hockey team, (Wolk, 2005); his personal assets are estimated to have peaked in value at \$1.4 billion. Ebbers was also very public about his religious faith. He was active in his church where he regularly taught Sunday school and often started corporate meetings with prayer.

By 2000, WorldCom was having great difficulty generating enough profit to cover its growing debts and meet shareholders' expectations. Amid difficulties experienced by many firms in the telecommunications section, WorldCom's stock price began a decline from which it would never recover. In Fall 2000, WorldCom informed analysts that its revenue would miss previous projections by some forty percent, and that 2001 earnings would be even lower. Ebbers fell into enormous personal debt and he pledged his WorldCom shares as collateral for loans. WorldCom's Board loaned Ebbers \$375 million to pay off his debts while not requiring him to sell any of his stock; this transaction later drew scrutiny from the SEC. All the while, WorldCom's financial problems continued to mount and in 2001 the company laid off 6,000 workers.

On April 29, 2002, Ebbers was ousted as CEO of WorldCom (announced as a resignation) and WorldCom announced another layoff of 17,000 workers; the company's stock price dropped below \$1. In late June 2002, WorldCom admitted to inflating earnings by \$3.8 billion; the SEC filed fraud charges against WorldCom the next day (Associated Press, 2005). The reported size of inflated earnings would be revised upward by another \$3.8 billion in August and eventually was estimated at over \$11 billion. Then-CFO Scott Sullivan and Controller David Myers were arrested on securities fraud and conspiracy charges. Less than a month later, with \$30 billion in debt, the company filed for bankruptcy.

In March 2004, Ebbers was indicted on federal accounting fraud charges. In May, a new indictment accused Ebbers of submitting six false filings to the SEC in 2001 and 2002; Ebbers pled not guilty to all charges. In a trial that ran from January through March 2005, Ebbers testified that he did not understand financial matters and that Sullivan created the accounting deceptions without his knowledge. Ebbers was found guilty and sentenced to 25 years in jail (Associated Press, 2005).

### **Ebbers' Indicators of Denial**

Our observation is that Ebbers provided indications of denial during and after his tenure as CEO of WorldCom (see Table 1). In terms of denial of facts, as late as February 2002, Ebbers categorically denied that any problems existed within WorldCom's business, or that bankruptcy was a possibility for the firm. Ebbers demonstrated a shift to denial of implications after being ousted as CEO, and WorldCom's indictment on accounting fraud – two irrefutable facts - when he reassured fellow church members attending worship services that he was not guilty and that

the charges against him were baseless (Waller, 2002). Ebbers also exhibited denial of change, which is characterized by avoiding responsibility and blaming others. He alternately blamed the WorldCom board and the federal government for WorldCom's problems (Burger, 2002). Finally, it appears that Ebbers engaged in denial of feelings, such as shame or remorse over others' losses as a result of his conduct when he said, "I believe I'll be vindicated" (Barfield, 1979).

Table				
Kearney's clinical model of denial and organizations illustrations of power-addicted leaders in denial				
Kearney's (1996) Clinical model of addiction and denial			Illustrations of Power-Addicted Leaders in Denial	
Layer of denial	Description	Examples of clinical addiction and denial	Ebbers on fraud at WorldCom	Fiorina on HP's purchase of Compaq
Denial of Facts	Is the most frequently used, outermost layer of protection. This outer layer is made up of selective perceiving and selective admitting - it seeks to block out objective data – and is elicited first in confrontations.	"I have not been drinking." "You have no right to accuse me." "That's not true."	"To question WorldCom's viability is utter nonsense. We continue to lead the industry with revenue growth... None of the rumors that have hatched in the last two weeks will change any of that." "WorldCom has a solid base of bill-paying customers, strong fundamentals, a solid balance sheet, manageable leverage and nearly \$10 billion in available liquidity. Bankruptcy or a credit default is not a concern." <i>Ebbers in a conference call with analysts and reporters, as quoted by Reuters, 7 February 2002.</i>	"This is not a company stuck. This is a company that leads in virtually every category in which we compete." <i>Fiorina, in reaction to criticism of HP's strategy on 10 December 2003.</i> "We cannot say every step has been perfect, but we can say with confidence today we are where we intended to be." <i>Fiorina, regarding HP's progress since the buyout on 8 June 2004.</i>
Denial of Implications	This protective layer of denial is used when some threatening fact does get established in awareness. When irrefutable facts cannot be covered up or denied, the individual denies the implications of his/her acts. Addicts in this layer attempt to minimize the kind (I only smoke pot), amount (I only had 3 highballs), how often (I only drink on weekends), or extent of damage (I can still drive, I have never had a DUI).	"OK, I had a few, but I wasn't drunk." "Sure, I like to drink, but that doesn't mean I'm an alcoholic." "Your brother drinks more than I do."	"I just want you to know you aren't going to church with a crook. No one will find me to have knowingly committed fraud." <i>Ebbers, speaking after worship services to members of his church congregation, 30 June 2002.</i>	"This is a decisive move that accelerates our strategy and positions us to win by offering even greater value to our customers and partners. In addition to the clear strategic benefits of combining two highly complementary organizations and product families, we can create substantial shareowner value through significant cost-structure improvements and access to new growth opportunities." <i>Fiorina, following the launch of the merger effort, 3 September 2001.</i>

Denial of Change	The person in denial of change resists the idea that his/her action (or inaction) has consequences. Counselors working with addicts often find that recovery is delayed or sabotaged when they encounter an elaborate system of excuses found at this level. Addicts may do so by making others responsible for their recovery steps. They have excuses for everything.	“So, I’m an alcoholic - so what?” “I’ll try to stop.” “It’s not my fault.”	“Here’s the thing: If I’d have been allowed to sell my stock when I wanted to, I’d have been \$600 million up, not \$200 million in the hole,” he said, blaming the WorldCom Board for blocking sales, a common practice in the corporate world. Later, Ebbers was overheard saying he wishes he could joust with the lawmakers hammering him. “My lawyer won’t let me testify, but if I could I would like to tell people a few things.” <i>Ebbers, as overheard in a bar 16 July 2002 and reported in the New York Daily News on 18 July 2002.</i>	“There is some confusion because we only recently began our marketing. We’re in an era were people need to think about business processes and applications horizontally... We need to think of the enterprise not as an island of stand-alone technology.” <i>Fiorina, on confusion surrounding HP’s strategy on 21 October 2003.</i> “I think the dot-com boom and bust represented the end of the beginning. The industry is more mature today.” <i>Fiorina, 23 September 2004.</i>
Denial of Feelings	The final layer of denial is the exclusion of feelings from awareness; [it] differs from the preceding level as it is wholly outside awareness or unconscious. This layer will shut off ideas, memories, or even consciousness itself...[and] protects years of self-doubts, shame, remorse for years of abuse, and the secrets of the soul. At this layer addicts are protecting themselves from feelings that are too strong.	“It doesn’t bother me.” “I’m not angry – fighting makes me tense – I have a headache.” “That’s an interesting idea.” “I don’t remember anything about that time in my life. Everything was fine.”	“I believe I’ll be vindicated,” blaming WorldCom’s record-setting bankruptcy on a “board coup.” <i>Ebbers, as reported in the New York Daily News on 18 July 2002.</i>	“While I regret the board and I have differences about how to execute HP’s strategy, I respect their decision.” <i>Fiorina, when she resigned on 9 February 2005</i>
<p>Notes: 1. All Bernard Ebbers’ quotes regarding the Denial of Facts are from Larson (2002). All Carly Fiorina quotes regarding the Denial of Facts are from CNET News.com (2005, February 9) Fiorina's tenure in quotes. Retrieved on July 15 2005, <a href="http://news.zdnet.com/2100-9595_22-5569517.html">http://news.zdnet.com/2100-9595_22-5569517.html</a></p> <p>2. Bernard Ebbers’ quote regarding Denial of Implications from Waller (2002).</p>				

### Carly Fiorina and Hewlett-Packard

Carly Fiorina’s leadership of Hewlett-Packard (1999-2005) can be best described as a turbulent time for HP (hp.com, n.d.). The turbulence stemmed from HP’s failed efforts in 2000 to bid for PriceWaterhouseCoopers and the company’s efforts to acquire Compaq Computer in 2001. According to Michael Kanellos (2005), editor at large at CNET News.com, “When history

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looks back on the tenure of Carly Fiorina as the CEO of Hewlett-Packard, the conclusion will likely be that she was a charismatic personality who tried to compensate for the lack of a consistent vision through a lot of acquisitions and management changes.”

Before joining HP as the CEO in July 1999, Carly Fiorina worked at AT&T and Lucent Technologies. In 2002, Fiorina pushed through a controversial merger with HP’s rival Compaq, despite objections from Walter Hewlett, son of HP’s founder Bill Hewlett. In 2001 Walter Hewlett clearly stated his reservations about the merger in the following words, “After careful deliberation, consultation with my financial adviser and consideration of developments since the announcement of the merger, I have decided to vote against the transaction. I believe that Hewlett-Packard can create greater value for stockholders as a stand-alone company than as a company combined with Compaq” (cnet news.com, 2005). Fiorina chose to disregard Hewlett’s opinion and won approval for the merger anyway after a bitter proxy battle. The merger with Compaq that Fiorina championed failed to deliver the benefits she had anticipated: many analysts claimed that the merger had in fact diluted profitability of HP’s imaging and printer division. Following the merger with Compaq, HP’s quarterly performance was inconsistent, leading to declining share price: the company’s stock price in 2005 was off about sixty-five percent from its high in 2000.

On February 9, 2005, HP’s Board of Directors decided to *relieve* Fiorina as chairman and Chief Executive Officer of HP. “While I regret the board and I have differences about how to execute HP’s strategy, I respect their decision,” Fiorina said in a statement. Under Hewlett-Packard’s severance agreement, Carly Fiorina’s total severance package was estimated to total over \$21 million (Strauss, 2005).

### **Fiorina’s Indicators of Denial**

In terms of denial of facts, Fiorina did not acknowledge that the HP-Compaq merger, that she had so strongly espoused, was not doing as well as expected. In December 2003, she asserted that HP was not stuck but was leading, and as late as June 2005, she reported that HP was where they intended to be (see Table 1). Her unsubstantiated support for the HP-Compaq merger, despite the opposition, indicated that she was in denial of the implications of her actions and believed that the implications of the merger had to be positive. By late 2003, HP’s performance was plummeting, under severe scrutiny, and in light of these irrefutable facts, Fiorina had no choice but to acknowledge that HP was undergoing some *confusion*. Fiorina’s responses may have indicated an acceptance of the facts and implications of her actions, but she denied of the need to change (Table 1). When Fiorina resigned in February 2005, she said she respected the HP board’s decision, denying any feelings associated with the termination of her relationship with HP that began in 1999.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS

In this article, we have identified that power-addiction and denial are under-investigated constructs in the literature on leadership and organizations. Additionally, we have recognized that adapting an accessible model of denial (Kearney's 1996 model) from the helping professions can serve as an example of how future research in organizational settings can adapt and apply existing knowledge. With the knowledge that addiction is a critical variable in the research and practice in most clinical specialties, and given that leaders and organizations are a rich source of data for organizational research, we expect that organizational scholars interested in this studying power-addiction and denial are likely to have relatively easy access to both, theory and data.

Another consequence of our research is that it sets precedence for the treatment of denial to other organizational experiences. For example, denial may be applied to better understand the equivocality of research on change management, organizational learning, top management team functioning and executive behavior, and emotional intelligence (Weidner & Purohit, 2003). The current research examined denial in individual leaders; however, it is possible that denial may exist as a commonly shared experience among organizational members (Janis, 1982; Keohane, 2005, Roy, 2002; Starbuck, & Farjoun, 2005). Therefore, in the future, examinations of power-addiction and denial in organizations may include more macro (group or organizational) level analyses.

Additionally, an important implication of our study is that can provide the momentum for research in the future to translate our conceptualizations of power-addiction and denial into empirically geared measures appropriate for organizational research. Such empirical advances in developing measures for power-addiction and denial potentially could open up further theoretical and empirical research avenues.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The noted historian Lord Acton observed, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." (libertystory.net, n.d.). We hope that our preceding discussion of power-addiction and denial has reinforced the fact that power-addicted leaders can cost organizations and its stakeholders a lot in terms of money, reputation and trust (Surowiecki, 2005). A leader's power-addiction and denial may be clear to organizational members with less power but they may not be comfortable sharing their insights given the hierarchical differentials existing between them and their leaders. Consequently, it is essential for an organization's survival and success to seriously investigate the feasibility of initiating and preserving effective measures to monitor executive power. We are aware that "hero CEOs" (Senge, 2002) or organizational founders may repel any efforts to counterbalance to their relatively unrestricted power (Adizes, 1988), however, we are sure that

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top leaders with more self-awareness (e.g., Michael Dell at Dell Computer, Andy Grove at Intel (Surowiecki, 2005) and self-monitoring are likely to appreciate the need for steps to counter-balance their power.

Power is potentially addictive and hazardous. Organizational members who work in potentially hazardous situations (e.g., undercover law enforcement, emergency room personnel, firefighters) are trained rigorously on the potential hazards associated with their work and preventative measures they can take to protect themselves and others from potential harms. We hope that our paper encourages organizations to implement formal and proactive executive education and development strategies to help leaders understand the potential hazards associated with their power. Such attention could help organizations protect their significant investment in leaders' selection and development and avert possible organizational crises and their accompanying devastating consequences.

### **SOME CAUTIONARY NOTES FOR RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS**

Our discussion of power-addiction and denial in organizational settings would be incomplete without a discussion of some of the instructive implications of this research. Our first cautionary note is that, the successful treatment of denial by practitioners and researchers is critically dependent upon the sensitivity with which this topic is addressed as it entails some aspects of judgment and social stigma.

The second note of caution when studying or applying denial stems from the fact that denial is a clearly defined construct in the clinical setting of the helping professions, however, its analysis in the organizational context is more complex. The successful understanding and diagnosis of denial in organizations hinges upon a key variable - time (Ancona, Goodman, Lawrence, & Tushman, 2001). The effectiveness and success of decisions are so much easier to judge in hindsight: successful decisions indicate vision and skills but failed decisions may be indicative of denial. An example of how 'time' is a critical variable in assessing denial is an examination of Johnson & Johnson's management of the Tylenol crisis. It exemplifies a classic case of managing a product recall crisis (Delaney, 1991). Ford and Firestone, on the other hand, represent organizations on the defensive – and in denial – about the hazards of rollovers in Ford sport-utility vehicles equipped with Firestone tires (Williams, 2004).

In addition to the impact of time, assessments and attributions of vision or direction in examining denial also make this a somewhat harder construct to fully explain. Organizations are 'born' sometimes from strong-willed founder(s) who are often thought of as not being grounded in "reality" (Adizes, 1988), but who have the drive and conviction in their ideas. An illustration of how time and personal drive add complexity to the construct of denial is Steve Jobs' role in Apple Computers. Jobs was often referred to as an individual in a "reality distortion field" (Levy, 2000), however, Apple's revival and current dominance in the portable music player business

is attributed largely to his ingenuity. Without Jobs' creativity and drive, Apple may not have been able to establish a market for legally purchasing downloadable music.

We listed the challenges in examining denial in organizations as an illustration of some key variables that add complexity to research in this area. We hope that a discussion of these challenges stimulates further research in this area rather than discouraging scholars from examining power-addiction and denial in organizations.

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# WILL YOU STILL LOVE ME WHEN I'M 64? THE BOOMERS AT WORK

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## ABSTRACT

*Boomers are about to redefine retirement. Instead of surfing and mountain-biking, Boomers will spend at least part of retirement not in leisure at all, but working, sometimes for pay, out of necessity, and sometimes for free, just because it is so personally rewarding. Not long ago, many employers looked askance at older workers, figuring they lacked the drive and imagination of their youthful cohorts. Times are changing. This paper will describe the stereotypes and myths of older workers, discuss the laws that cover older workers, describe the brain drain that is occurring in American business, detail what some companies have done, and describe what managers can do to retain Boomers while continuing to enhance their company's bottom line.*

## INTRODUCTION

*"Retirement at sixty-five is ridiculous. When I was sixty-five, I still had pimples."*  
George Burns

The leading edge of the Boomer generation, those born in 1946, were 18 when the Beatles made their U.S. debut on the Ed Sullivan Show and 23 when Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon. In 1974, they watched Nixon's televised resignation speech, and they witnessed the historic fall of the Berlin Wall 15 years later. Boomers' demographic influence cannot be underestimated (Rheault, 2006). Their youthful defiance is forever enshrined in popular culture by their "Make Love, Not War" motto and their song "The Age of Aquarius."

Wherever the Boomers went, the cultural zeitgeist followed. When they were born, there was a baby boom. When they went off to school, there were overcrowded classrooms and double sessions. When they hit puberty, there was a sexual revolution. When they went off to college, there was unrest on campus. When they entered the job market, there was record employment. When they started buying homes for the first time, home prices soared. When they started buying second homes, real estate prices skyrocketed (Steidtmann, 2006). And with annual

spending power now estimated at more than \$2 trillion, they are about to redefine retirement (Rheault, 2006).

The vision of a traditional work-free retirement is yielding to a new notion of a work-filled retirement. We need to change retirement's image, not just to include forever-young Boomers surfing and mountain-biking, rather than playing shuffleboard. The real change is more radical. Growing number of Boomers will spend at least part of retirement not in leisure at all, but working – sometimes for pay, out of necessity, and sometimes for free, just because it is so personally rewarding. It is a different picture from what we usually see, but it is full, richer, and more complex (Colvin, 2006).

Not long ago, many employers looked askance at older workers, figuring they lacked the drive and imagination of their youthful cohorts. And besides, went the reasoning, younger people would work for less money. Times are changing. Many businesses today are starting to view the mature worker as an essential commodity. This stems less from humanistic concern, and more from changing demographics: workers are getting older and their replacements are getting scarcer (Perry, 2005). In fact, some 74 million Boomers (over 40% of the US labor force) are posed to retire in large numbers by the end of this decade. In industries already facing labor and skills shortages, forward-thinking companies are recruiting, retaining, and developing flexible work-time arrangements and/or phased retirement plans for those workers (55 years of age or older), many of whom have skills that are difficult to replace. Such actions are putting these companies ahead of competitors who view the aging workforce largely as a burden putting strains on pension plans and healthcare costs (America's Aging Workforce, 2005). This paper will describe the stereotypes and myths of older workers, discuss the laws that cover older workers, describe the brain drain that is occurring in American business, detail what some companies have done, and describe what managers can do to retain Boomers while continuing to enhance their company's bottom line.

### **STEREOTYPES AND MYTHS**

*“Age-based retirement arbitrarily severs productive persons from their livelihood, squanders their talents, scars their health, strains an already overburdened Social Security System, and drives many elderly people into poverty and despair. Ageism is as odious as racism and sexism.”*

Claude Pepper

Stereotyping is judging, reacting to, or treating another person on the basis of one's perception of the group to which that person belongs or in which they have been placed. The terms old or older describe a group of people to which certain characteristics are assigned. They may include positive traits such as experience, good judgment, strong work ethic, and a

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commitment to quality. In a more negative vein, older workers have been characterized as lacking flexibility, resistant to new technology, unwilling or unable to learn new skills, and unable to change or adapt. Many people attribute high absenteeism, and high job turnover to the older population due to the stereotype of a physically and mentally declining individual (Lord & Farrington, 2006).

Bureau of Labor Statistics show that in 2002, those age 25-54 made up about 76% of the work population and experienced 75% of the recordable work injuries involving days away from work. Those age 55 and older accounted for approximately 13.6% of the working population and contributed to only 10.4% of the recordable injuries involving days away from work. The productivity data show that those people in the 55+ age bracket also appear to be more productive than their younger counterparts. A possible explanation for this seemingly counterintuitive phenomenon may be that work and life experience help free up attention and/or physical capacity through more efficient means of task completion (Haight, 2006).

There are numerous myths and misunderstandings that suggest age and health are bad for business. Health is influenced by many factors, namely lifestyle, activity, and nutrition. The good news is that the general health of older adults is improving. Older workers generally have lower number of absences than their younger colleagues, and older workers have a more positive attitude toward complying with health and safety in the workplace. In addition, we know that as people grow older, both physical and mental capacity does change with age. However, recent evidence demonstrates that any variation in brain function in older adults is not decreased function, but simply different from younger adults. Mental functions can even improve with increased experience. Also, older workers can generally compensate for any decreases in speed by increases in quality and accuracy. So there are positive attributes of increased age, including attention to detail, increased knowledge, experience and understanding (Alker, 2006).

## LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

*“Retirement kills more people than hard work ever did.”*

Malcolm S. Forbes

For employers, a graying workforce creates both opportunity and potential liability. Opportunity lies in using older workers' skills to fill gaps occasioned by the declining birth rate. But liability will arise if your organization improperly excludes, marginalizes or tosses aside older workers. They will fight back, and they will find strong allies. Between 1997 and 2003, age discrimination plaintiffs recovered more money from juries than did any other protected group. Juries' support for age discrimination plaintiffs is less about empathy and more about narcissism. Aging is universal; we cannot say that about any other protected group.

When enacted in 1967, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) protected individuals from age 40 to age 65 only, thus permitting employers to impose mandatory retirement at age 65. The age 65 ceiling was increased to 70 in 1978, and in 1986, Congress finally eliminated the age 70 ceiling, with a few narrow exceptions. Now, even Methuselah could not be forced to retire solely because of his age (Segal, 2006).

Yet, age discrimination is common at work. More than one in five workers over the age of 50 say that they have experienced discrimination either when applying for jobs or in the workplace (Grainge, 2006). Failure to adjust ageist assumptions has proved costly in the United States. For example, Ford Motor Company was forced to pay \$10 million to settle class action claims when it was shown that performance scores for older workers were consistently low. The scores were being used as a basis for redundancy selection (Donkin, 2006).

And, if you think that workers are like fine wine and improve with age, it does not violate the federal ADEA to target older workers for recruitment. The Supreme Court in its decision *General Dynamics Land Systems Inc. v. Cline*, 540 U.S. 581 (2004) concluded that there is no such thing under the ADEA as reverse age discrimination. A group of employees between the ages of 40-50 had challenged their employer's decision to eliminate its future obligation to pay retiree health benefits to any worker then under 50 years of age while preserving future entitlement to such benefits for older employees. The Court found that there was no evidence that younger workers suffered when their elders were favored (Smith, 2006).

### **BRAIN DRAIN**

*"A man is known by the company that keeps him on after retirement age."*

Anonymous

Given that most societies are geared to retirement at around 65, companies have a looming problem of knowledge management, of making sure that the Boomers do not leave before they have handed over their expertise along with the office keys and their e-mail address. A survey of human resource directors by IBM last year concluded that when the Baby Boomer generation retires, many companies will find out too late that a career's worth of experience has walked out the door, leaving insufficient talent to fill the void. Some companies also face a shortage of expertise. In aerospace and defense, for example, as much as 40% of the workforce in some companies will be eligible to retire within the next five years. At the same time, the number of engineering graduates in developed countries is in steep decline (Special Report, 2006).

Employees preparing to fill the shoes of Boomers lack experience with the position and sometimes the company. Networking, corporate culture, and customer communication, both internal and external, are often difficult for generation X and Y employees because they cannot

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be accomplished through e-mail or memos. Trainees may not understand building business relationships personally (Bernhart, 2006). To alleviate this problem, the most seasoned employees should spend more time, not less, sharing knowledge. If a company took their most valuable experts off the job for two days a week and they spent that time mentoring and coaching less experienced staff, the impact over two years would return their investment 10-fold, because they would be spreading their skills. And, most people are keen to help younger generations (Paine, 2006).

Mentoring is essentially the pairing of two individuals, one of whom needs to acquire the expertise possessed by the other. While the process is similar to coaching, mentoring usually targets more subtle skills requisite to the enhancement of career potential. Examples include: dealing with customers in productive and sensitive ways that encourage loyalty, cultivating a creative mind-set that produces profitable ideas for the organization and applying oneself in ways that go beyond the job description into the area of power performance.

Smart mentoring does more than lock in profitable talent; it also motivates participants. Mentors enjoy ego boosts when they make a difference in other people's lives. After all, everyone appreciates recognition for hard-won talents. Mentees, for their part, enjoy greater control over the reins of their careers. Indeed, mentoring can be a valuable recruitment tool (Perry, 2006).

### **WHAT SOME COMPANIES HAVE DONE**

Some companies that are concerned about a wave of retirements are getting creative, including offering programs that let employees technically retire, yet stay connected to their employers. For instance, Southern Company, an Atlanta-based electric utility company with 25,000 employees, has created a "retiree reservists pool" for its Georgia unit, a data base of several hundred retired workers who can be called on during hurricanes and other emergencies to train new hires, and to staff short-term projects. In addition, Lincoln National Corporation put together a task force to design flexible work arrangement for older employees who want to work part time or take longer vacations. Also, IBM taps some retirees to work on special projects so they can share their expertise with younger workers. And, Home Depot, in partnership with AARP, has decided to recruit older workers, many of them laid off from other companies (Greene, 2005).

Of course, some companies are not working hard to keep older employees. Some companies believe that hanging on to older workers is not the only way to cope with a falling supply of labor. The participation of developing countries in the world economy has increased the overall supply. In addition, a vast amount of work is being sent offshore to such places as China and India and more will go in the future. Some countries, such as Australia, are relaxing their immigration policies to allow much needed skills to come in from abroad. Others will

avoid the need for workers by spending money on machinery and automation. Yet, older workers are an obvious source of labor, partly because a survey found that 39% of Americans over 54 now doubt they will have sufficient money for old age (Special Report, 2006).

### WHAT MANAGERS CAN DO

*“Eternal rest sounds comforting in the pulpit; well, you try it once, and see how heavy time will hang on your hands.”*

Mark Twain

Employers need to begin now to build integrated strategies to encourage employees with valuable skills and experience to stay in the workforce while the organization transfers their expertise or develops/recruits the talent needed to replace them. Like any commodity, older employees are getting more valuable as they get scarcer. A few things managers can do to retain their Boomers include:

- ◆ Eliminate stereotypes
- ◆ Motivate older workers
- ◆ Distribute work fairly
- ◆ Encourage postponement of retirement
- ◆ Allow flex time
- ◆ Invite retired employees back at least once a year for a company luncheon.
- ◆ Develop a post-retirement data base noting skills and experience of each retiree.
- ◆ Update performance management and reward systems
- ◆ Allow working at home

### CONCLUSION

*“Rest is a good thing, but boredom is its brother.”*

Voltaire

The culture and values of the older worker are significant assets for the companies that choose to attract and retain them. These values include commitment and loyalty to the employer, fewer sick days, reduced injuries, and enhanced length of service. As the workforce ages and contracts, skilled workers will increasingly come at a premium. Managers who fail to respond to the threat will put their future growth and profitability at risk, while missing out on the benefits of greater age diversity. To be successful in an increasingly competitive market place, managers need to attract and retain Boomers and, yes, love them when they're 64.

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# **MODERATING EFFECT OF SUPERVISORY ROLE DEFINITIONS AND EMPLOYEE IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR AND INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Recently there has been a dramatic increase in research on Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) or discretionary behavior that is not directly or explicitly recognized by the organization, but in the aggregate contributes to organizational effectiveness. This increase can be attributed to the greater use of flatter and autonomous team-based structures in organizations and the consequent emphasis on individual initiative and cooperation. Examples of OCB include, helping co-workers who are behind in their work, showing pride when representing the organization in public, volunteering for overtime work when needed, and not complaining about minor inconveniences that are a normal part of organizational life. From the above examples it is clear that OCB can contribute to organizational effectiveness in many ways.*

*Most of the early research on OCB focused on its antecedents. More recently, increasing attention has been paid to the consequences of OCB. Findings from this line of research indicate that OCBs have important consequences for both individuals and the organization as a whole. This paper develops a conceptual framework for the moderating effects of supervisory role definitions and employee impression management on the relationship between OCB and individual outcomes. First, a distinction is made between two types of individual outcomes for OCB, economic exchange outcomes and social exchange outcomes. When there is a clear quid-pro-quo relationship between work behavior and an outcome, and/or if the outcome can be easily converted into money, it can be considered as an economic exchange outcome. When the relationship between the work behavior and the outcome is more tenuous, the benefits of the outcomes are long term, and the value of the outcome is not easily converted into money, it can be considered as a social exchange outcome. Next, social exchange outcomes are proposed as the consequence of organizational citizenship behavior. Then, supervisory role definitions and employee impression management are proposed as moderators of the relationship between*

*organizational citizenship behavior and social exchange outcomes. An individual's interpretation of what constitutes the role obligations of a specific job can be called his or her role definition. Impression Management consists of behaviors that a person engages in with the intention of manipulating the perceptions of others about one-self. The paper argues that supervisor will be less likely to provide social exchange outcomes in return for employee OCB if they have broad job definitions and if they perceive these behaviors to be impression management.*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper outlines a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and individual outcomes. A distinction is made between two types of individual outcomes for work performance, economic exchange outcomes and social exchange outcomes. The paper argues that organizational citizenship behavior will result in supervisors providing social exchange outcomes for individuals. Supervisor's definition of the employee's role (role definition) and employee impression management are proposed as moderators of the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and social exchange outcomes. The paper argues that supervisors will be more likely to provide social exchange outcomes to individuals who engage in organizational citizenship behavior when they have narrow role definitions and when they do not perceive the employee's behavior as impression management.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Recently there has been a dramatic increase in research on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Podaskoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000) or behavior that contributes indirectly to the organization through the maintenance of the organization's social system (Organ, 1997). This increase can be attributed to the greater use of flatter and autonomous team-based structures in organizations and the consequent emphasis on individual initiative and cooperation (Lepine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002). Examples of OCB include; helping co-workers who are behind in their work, showing pride when representing the organization in public, volunteering for overtime work when needed, and not complaining about minor inconveniences that are a normal part of organizational life.

An important reason for the interest in organizational citizenship behaviors is the indication that these behaviors contribute to organizational effectiveness (Morgeson, 1999; Organ, 1988; Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 1997). This belief is based on the assumption that citizenship behaviors may enhance organizational performance "by 'lubricating' the social machinery of the organization, reducing friction, and/or increasing efficiency" (Podsakoff, &

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MacKenzie; p. 135). Citizenship behaviors may contribute to organizational success by enhancing co-worker and managerial productivity, promoting better use of scarce resources, improving coordination, strengthening the organization's ability to attract and retain better employees, reducing variability of performance, and enabling better adaptation to environmental changes. Empirical research suggests that OCB is related to several indicators of organizational performance (Podsakoff et al. 2000). These indicators of organizational performance include; unit performance (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994), quantity and quality of production (Podsakoff, Ahearne & MacKenzie, 1997), overall operating efficiency, quality of performance, and revenue to full-time equivalents (Walz & Niehoff, 1996), customer satisfaction (Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz & Niles-Jolly, 2005) and productivity and turnover (Sun, Aryee & Law, 2007).

Most of the early research on OCB focused on its antecedents (Organ & Ryan, 1995). More recently, increasing attention has been paid to the consequences of OCB (Podaskoff et al. 2000; Bacharach, Powell, Bendoly & Richey, 2006). Findings from this line of research indicate that OCBs have important consequences for both individuals and the organization as a whole (Podaskoff et al. 2000). At the individual level, OCBs have been found to affect supervisory evaluations of employee performance, salary recommendations, and promotion recommendations (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Hui, 1993). In a recent field quasi- experiment, Hui, Lam, & Law (2000) found that employees who perform higher levels of OCB are more likely to be promoted than employees who perform lower levels of OCB.

There is very little theoretical or empirical research on the factors that affect the supervisor's decision to provide positive outcomes to individuals in return for their OCB. This paper fills this gap in the literature by developing a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between OCB and its individual outcomes. This paper argues that the individual outcomes of OCB are social exchange outcomes rather than economic exchange outcomes. Further, the paper proposes that the supervisor's decision to facilitate social exchange outcomes will be affected by two factors, the supervisor's definition of the employee's role (role definition, Morrison, 1994) and the supervisor's perceptions about whether the employee engaging in impression management. The supervisor's definition of the employee's role and whether the supervisor considers the employee's behavior to be impression management are proposed as moderators of the relationship between individual OCB and social exchange outcomes.

It is important for employees to understand the various consequences of engaging or not engaging in OCBs. Since OCBs are often considered to be discretionary behaviors, a clear understanding of these consequences will help employees to make more informed decisions about engaging in OCBs. It is also important for employees to know the circumstances under which supervisors value OCBs. If the job definitions of the supervisors and employees are different, what employees may consider as extra-role behavior may be viewed as in-role by supervisors and therefore as not meriting any special consideration.

## OUTCOMES OF OCB

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) is the theoretical framework on which much of the research on OCB is based (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Organ, 1988). Social exchange theory suggests that social relationships (including employment relationships) can be classified into two types, social exchange relationships and economic exchange relationships. Social exchange relationships are relationships in which the mutual obligations of the parties are not formally specified. When one party to the relationship provides a resource to the other party, there is an expectation that a similar resource will be returned (Foa & Foa, 1980), but the exact nature and timing of the return is discretionary. These relationships are characterized by feelings of personal obligation, gratitude, and trust. Such relationships encourage spontaneous and cooperative behaviors (like OCBs) that go beyond formally specified obligations. Economic exchange relationships, on the other hand, are relationships in which the terms of the exchange are clearly specified. In such relationships, the parties are unlikely to engage in spontaneous or cooperative behaviors that go beyond specifications. Organ (1990) suggests that individuals enter an organization presuming a social exchange relationship and willing to engage in citizenship behaviors. They will continue to engage in citizenship behaviors until the treatment by the organization forces them to redefine the relationship as an economic exchange.

It can be argued that, following Organ's (1988) original conceptualisation of OCB as behaviour that is not formally recognized by the organization, virtue is its own reward and employees engage in OCB without expecting anything in return. However, Organ (1988) himself has pointed out that employees who engage in OCB may believe that over the long term their actions will be noticed and that positive outcomes will be forthcoming. Further, the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) requires that when favours are rendered, a return is obligatory. It is only the timing and nature of the return that is not specified in social exchange (Blau, 1964).

It can also be argued that, when employees engage in certain behaviors to obtain specific outcomes, such behaviors are not OCB, and economic exchange, rather than social exchange, is the appropriate framework for explaining such behaviours. When using a social exchange framework, it is therefore important to focus on work related outcomes that are congruent with this framework. In social exchange relationships, reciprocation is expected for contributions, but the nature and timing of the reciprocation is not specified. For instance, Organ (1988), argued that, "OCB may be rendered on the assumption that this adds to the person's total contribution to the organization, and in the long run, the person's total contribution secures an equitable or just recompense" (p. 27).

Foa and Foa (1980) classify resources that can be exchanged in interpersonal situations on the basis of two attributes: concreteness versus symbolism, and particularism versus universalism. They propose six classes of resources; information, status, love, services, goods,

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and money. Status and love are more particular and less concrete resources while money and goods are less particular and more concrete resources.

Foa and Foa (1980) suggest that resources that are adjacent to each other in their configuration are more likely to be exchanged. Status and love are adjacent to information and services respectively. According to Moorman (1991), specific acts of OCB may belong to information resources or services resources. Thus, OCB is likely to be exchanged for individual outcomes that represent status and love in organizations and such outcomes can be considered as social exchange outcomes. Similarly, money and goods are adjacent to each other and are likely to be exchanged for each other. Such exchange is usually economic exchange.

Based on the above discussion, outcomes in an exchange relationship like the employment relationship can be considered as economic exchange outcomes and social exchange outcomes. When the outcome is universal and particular like money, it can be considered as an economic exchange outcome. If the outcome is particular and symbolic like love and status it can be considered as social exchange outcome. When the exchange is on the basis of a formally prescribed agreement, there is a clear quid-pro-quo relationship between work behavior and an outcome and if the behavior and the outcome are specified in advance, it can be considered as an economic exchange outcome. Examples of economic exchange outcomes are piece-rate pay and sales bonuses. When the relationship between the work behaviour and the outcome is more tenuous, the benefits of the outcomes are long term, it can be considered as a social exchange outcome. Examples of social exchange outcomes are favorable performance appraisals, promotions, challenging assignments and opportunities for training.

Supervisors often have relatively less discretion in providing economic exchange outcomes. When the individual engages in the required behaviours or produces the required output, the outcome is almost automatic. Because the connection between specific behaviours and social exchange outcomes are less explicit, supervisors may have greater discretion to provide outcomes. Social exchange outcomes are therefore more likely to be related to subjective evaluations of performance, including those of extra role behaviours.

Since OCB contributes to work group (Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie, 1997) and organizational performance (Walz & Niehoff, 1996; Podsakoff et al. 2000; Koys, 2001; Schneider et al. 2005; Sun, Aryee & Law, 2007) a positive relationship can be expected between OCB and social exchange outcomes for individuals. This is because supervisors are likely to reciprocate employee OCB that benefits them and the organization by providing social exchange outcomes for employees. At the same time, since economic exchange outcomes are given for performance of specified tasks, there is no incentive to go beyond role specifications. Therefore a negative relationship can be expected between OCB and economic exchange outcomes.

*Proposition 1: OCB will be positively related to social exchange outcomes and negatively related to economic exchange outcomes.*

## MODERATORS OF OCB -SOCIAL EXCHANGE OUTCOMES RELATIONSHIP

Willingness of supervisors to provide these social exchange outcomes is likely to be influenced by at least two factors, supervisor's definition of the employee's role and employee impression management.

### **Role Definition**

Research on role making (Graen, 1976) suggests that roles in organization are seldom fixed and that role perceptions evolve as employees and supervisors negotiate the scope of work activities. Similarly, work on psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1989) indicates that employees and employers have substantially different understandings about employment obligations. Finally, social information processing research (Salancik, & Pfeffer, 1978) suggests that jobs are cognitive constructions created when employees and employers make sense of social and behavioral cues. Work roles are therefore likely to be socially constructed with only a subjective boundary between in-role and extra-role work behavior (Morrison, 1994). This makes what constitutes these two behaviors subject to multiple interpretations. An individual's interpretation of what constitutes the role obligations of a specific job can be called his or her role definition (Morrison, 1994).

Morrison's (1994) empirical results indicated that employees and supervisors differed in what they each perceived to be in-role and extra-role behaviour. Morrison also found that employees were more likely to engage in behaviours that they considered as in-role rather than extra-role.

It seems likely that the breadth of supervisors' definition of the employee's role will affect supervisory evaluations of employee behaviour. If a supervisor defines the role broadly and considers many citizenship behaviours to be an expected part of the employee's role, these behaviours are less likely to merit special attention. If the supervisor has a narrow definition of the role and considers many citizenship behaviours to be beyond what is expected from the employee's role, such behaviours are likely to lead to very positive evaluations and therefore to a greater willingness to provide social exchange outcomes for the employee.

Since OCB is generally helpful to the supervisor (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1991), good citizens will be liked by supervisors regardless of whether they consider these behaviours to be an expected part of that individual's role. However, when allocating rewards, supervisors will tend to search for distinctiveness information (De Nisi, Cafferty, & Meglino, 1984). When OCB is not considered as an expected part of an employee's role, it will be seen as a distinctive form of subordinate behaviour and therefore meriting of consideration while making reward allocation decisions. Therefore it is likely that supervisor's role definition of the employee's job will moderate the relationship between OCB and social exchange outcomes.

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*Proposition 2: The relationship between OCB and social exchange outcomes will be moderated by the supervisor's definition of the employee's role, such that, the relationship will be stronger when the supervisor defines the role narrowly than when the supervisor defines the role broadly.*

### **Impression Management**

Impression Management consists of behaviours that a person engages in with the intention of manipulating the perceptions of others about one-self. Schnake (1991) argued that unless the motives behind the behaviour are known, certain impression management behaviours could be wrongly coded as OCB or vice versa. Recently, a number of researchers have focused on the relationship between supervisors and employees from an impression management perspective (Wayne, & Ferris, 1990; Wayne, & Green, 1993; Ferris, Bhawuk, Fedor & Judge, 1995; Eastman, 1994; Rao, Schmidt, & Murray, 1995). Bolino and colleagues have argued that impression management concerns may motivate OCB, apart from social exchange and personality factors (Bolino, 1999; Bolino, Varela, Bande & Turnley, 2006). Eastman (1994) argued that ingratiation (a form of impression management) is similar to OCB, but that supervisors will respond differently to employees depending on whether they label this behaviour as impression management or OCB. Eastman's results indicated that attribution of motive was related to supervisory decisions on employee outcomes. When supervisors labelled employees as good citizens they were given greater rewards than those labeled as ingratiators or as those not exhibiting OCB. Similarly, Bolino, (1999) proposes that the relationship between OCB and the image of a good citizen will be moderated by observer attribution of motive. The relationship is likely to be weaker when observers attribute impression management as the motive for engaging in OCB. Finally, Ferris et al. (1995) argue that the key distinction between organizational politics (including impression management) and OCB "involves a behavior labeling process that is triggered by the perceiver's attributions of intentionality" (p 231). It is likely then that the relationship between OCB and social exchange outcomes mediated by supervisors will be moderated by perceptions of impression management.

*Proposition 3: The relationship between OCB and social exchange outcomes will be moderated by supervisor's perception of impression management by the employee, such that, the relationship will be stronger when the supervisor perceives the employee as not engaging in impression management and weaker when the supervisor perceives the employee to be engaging in impression management.*

## CONCLUSION

The literature indicates that a positive relationship between citizenship behaviours and social exchange outcomes provided by supervisors exist. However, this relationship is likely to be moderated by supervisor's definition of the employee's role and perceptions of impression management.

The conceptual framework developed in this paper can guide empirical research. Ideally, citizenship, impression management and role definitions should be measured from supervisors and social exchange outcomes reported by employees. This design overcomes the problem of common method variance. Standard measures for all the above variables, except social exchange outcomes are available in the literature. A scale for social exchange outcomes needs to be developed. Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997) report a scale of developmental experiences that appear to fit the definition of social exchange outcomes. A preliminary scale of social exchange outcomes can be developed based on the items of this scale.

This paper contributes to OCB literature by distinguishing between social exchange outcomes and economic exchange outcomes and by proposing social exchange outcomes as individual outcomes of engaging in OCB. It also ties together the literature on role definitions and impression management to clarify supervisory perceptions of employee OCB. It is hoped that this paper will encourage further conceptual and empirical research on the outcomes of OCB and indicates further conceptual and empirical research on the outcomes of OCB is warranted to further understand its effects in the workplace.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The relationship between OCB and social exchange outcomes is likely to be reciprocal. It is therefore important to understand the factors that influence this relationship from a practical perspective. The role definition held by supervisors is especially important in this regard. If the role definitions of supervisor and employees are different, what employees may consider extra-role behavior may be viewed as in-role by supervisors and therefore as not requiring any special reciprocation. This points to the importance of dialogue between supervisors and employees to develop common perspectives on role definitions.

The relationship between OCB and social exchange outcomes is important for employees. This relationship helps to clarify for employees the kinds of behaviours that are implicitly valued by supervisors and are important for getting ahead in the organization. Since perception of impression management moderates the relationship between citizenship behaviours and social exchange outcomes, it becomes important for employees to ensure that their contributions are perceived as genuine and not as attempts to manage impressions of their superiors. This again points to the need for effective communication between employees and supervisors.

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