

Volume 8, Number 2

ISSN 1544-0508

JOURNAL OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, COMMUNICATIONS AND CONFLICT

An official Journal of the
Allied Academies, Inc.

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Academy Information
is published on the Allied Academies web page
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Whitney Press, Inc.

*Printed by Whitney Press, Inc.
PO Box 1064, Cullowhee, NC 28723
www.whitneypress.com*

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CONTENTS OF VOLUME 8, NUMBER 2

EDITORIAL REVIEW BOARD	iii
LETTER FROM THE EDITORS	vi
BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND BEHAVIORAL INTENT: A MODEL OF TRUST	1
Fuan Li, William Paterson University	
Stephen C. Betts, William Paterson University	
COMMUNICATION AND MISCOMMUNICATION IN CORPORATE AMERICA: EVIDENCE FROM FORTUNE 200 FIRMS	13
Nitham M. Hindi, Texas State University - San Marcos	
Donald S. Miller, Emporia State University	
Stephen E. Catt, Emporia State University	
A MEETING PLANNING PROJECT: A MAJOR COMPONENT IN DEVELOPING TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATIVE WRITING SKILLS	27
Virginia Hemby, Indiana University of Pennsylvania	
Bill McPherson, Indiana University of Pennsylvania	
Wayne Moore, Indiana University of Pennsylvania	
Linda F. Szul, Indiana University of Pennsylvania	
Dawn Woodland, Indiana University of Pennsylvania	
Kelly Wilkinson, University of Missouri-Columbia	

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH-ONLY POLICIES IN U.S. WORK ENVIRONMENTS	47
Catherine G. Green, The University of Memphis Lillian H. Chaney, The University of Memphis	
THE ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS OF REDUCING CYBERSLACKING IN THE WORKPLACE	55
Pamela R. Johnson, California State University, Chico Julie Indvik, California State University, Chico	
CREATIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE: MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR POSITIVE COMMUNICATIONS	63
James T. Rhodes, Christian Brothers University Sarah T. Pitts, Christian Brothers University Rob H. Kamery, Christian Brothers University	
COMMUNICATING WITH MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS: BUILDING EFFECTIVE UNIVERSITY WEB SITES	73
Gary P. Schneider, University of San Diego Carol M. Bruton, California State University San Marcos	
WRITING YOUR WAY INTO A JOB: HOW EFFECTIVE USE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CAN MAKE OR BREAK THE JOB SEARCH	81
Melissa A. McMasters, Carnegie Mellon University	
ASSESSING HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN QUALITY: SURVEY DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH AGENDA	89
R. Cayce Lawrence, Christian Brothers University Reginald M. Peyton, Christian Brothers University Rob H. Kamery, Christian Brothers University	

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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BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND BEHAVIORAL INTENT: A MODEL OF TRUST

Fuan Li, William Paterson University
Stephen C. Betts, William Paterson University

ABSTRACT

In recent years trust has drawn a great deal of attention from both business practitioners and scholars. Few constructs have been defined in so many different ways resulting in much confusion. Numerous studies have looked at interpersonal trust, organizational trust, or trust in exchange relationships, but the underlying meaning of trust seems to remain elusive. This research attempts to improve our understanding of the nature of trust through an examination of various perspectives and by presenting an integrated model of the construct. To account for the differences among these diverse perspectives, the model portrays trust as a decision to place one's confidence in others. As a central construct, trust is preceded by expectations and followed by behavioral intent and ultimately by actions. Expectations, as an antecedent of trust, are conceived to be a function of perceived risk, anticipations of the outcomes associated with a specific situation, and perceived trustworthiness of the party involved.

INTRODUCTION

Trust is a central issue in many active areas of business research, including teamwork, leadership, organizational relations, buyer-seller relationships, strategic alliances, and organizational governance. Drawing on research findings in other social sciences such as economics, psychology, and sociology, researchers in business generally agree that trust is critical to organizational governance (Powell, 1996), intra- and inter-organization relationships, and effective, long lasting business relations (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sirdeshmukh, Singh & Sabol, 2002). As a fundamental social force (Lewis & Weigert, 1985), trust provides an important mechanism for control (Nooteboom, Berger & Noorderhaven, 1997), enables cooperative behavior (Gambetta, 1988), promotes adaptive organizational forms in network relations (Miles & Snow, 1992), decreases transaction costs (Meyerson, Weick & Kramer 1996), and facilitates and enhances strategic partnerships (Shapiro, Sheppard & Cheraskin, 1992).

Despite great efforts made by scholars, our understanding of trust remains elusive and little consensus has been achieved among scholars with regard to the nature of trust. Trust has been

conceptualized in various ways. Some scholars define trust "in terms of confident positive expectations regarding another's conduct" (Lewicki & Bies, 1998, p. 439). To them, Trust is "a particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses that another agent or group of agents will perform a particular action" (Gambetta, 1988, p. 217). Or it is "an expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied on" (Rotter, 1967, p. 651).

Other scholars define trust in terms of behavioral intent; trust is viewed as "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman, 1993, p. 82). Consequently, trust is said to exist "to the extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another" (McAllister, 1995, p.25).

In addition, some scholars view trust in terms of one's perception or feeling of the party to be trusted. For example, Tyler & DeGoez (1996, p.335) "define trust in terms of feelings that an authority made a good-faith effort and treated the parties involved in the conflict fairly." For those, perceived trustworthiness of the trustee is central to trust.

Some scholars try to incorporate different perspectives as well as situational characteristics in conceptualizing trust. A widely cited definition of trust states, "An individual may be said to have trust in the occurrence of an event if he expects its occurrence and his expectations lead to behavior which he perceives to have greater negative consequences if the expectation is not confirmed than positive motivational consequences if it is confirmed" (Deutsch, 1958, p. 266).

The great variety of conceptualization of trust cries for further efforts in clarifying this important construct. In this paper we attempt to discuss diverse approaches and perspective in defining trust, and propose an integrative model of trust. Specifically, we first review various perspectives and levels of analysis found in the literature examining the reasons for the disparities in the definitions. For each reason we establish our position, thus laying the groundwork for our model. The model considers trust as a central construct preceded by expectations and followed by behavioral intent and action

PERSPECTIVES AND LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

The different definitions of trust exist for several reasons. First, trust can be examined at multiple levels of analysis. Understandably, different forms of trust may exist at different levels. It can be analyzed at individual, group (team), organizational, inter-organizational, or societal levels. Significant differences in the nature of the construct exist between the levels. For example, at the extremes interpersonal trust is dyadic in nature while societal trust is holistic (Powell & Heriot, 2000). We choose to examine trust at the individual level. This choice is based on the notion that the most basic level of trust is the dyad between an individual and another party. Trust at other levels of analysis represent aggregations of individual level trust and cannot exist without individual trust.

The second reason is that various research perspectives can be assumed within each level of analysis. It has long been recognized that disciplinary disparities may entail divergent assumptions in treating trust. For instance, economists are committed to agency theory (Williamson, 1993), therefore tend to view trust as calculated probability of an event. In psychology trust is commonly considered as a personal trait or a psychological state such as attitudes or tendency to take risk (Rotter, 1967). Sociologists often regard trust as a social force (Luhmann, 1979), an institutional phenomenon (individuals' trust in institutions or trust between institutions), or socially embedded properties of relationships among people (Granovetter, 1985; Zucker, 1986). Social psychologists focus on the interpersonal transactions between individuals at both personal and/or group levels regarding trust as the expectation of the other party in a transaction and the risks associated with assuming and acting on such expectations (Deutsch, 1960). We choose to view trust at the individual level, therefore we adopt the psychologist's perspective that trust is a psychological state.

The third reason is that trust is a multidimensional construct. To have trust is to have confidence that the other person is competent in playing her assumed role, or benevolent in terms of behavioral motives. It could indicate one's confidence in the person's behavior: what is expected to happen. It may also imply the person is a reliable or dependable person. Importantly, trust in a person could have various meanings simultaneously or exist in terms of one aspect but not in terms of another dimension. Trust in a mother's benevolence may not have anything to do with her competence to perform a particular task to help. We can have complete trust in a bank clerk in her competence in role performance without any knowledge of her or any attention paid to the nature of her intention. A model of trust must be flexible or comprehensive enough to reflect the multidimensional nature of trust.

A final reason for the wide variety of definitions of trust is that trust can be built on a variety of bases. For instance, past interactions and the knowledge/familiarity resulting for repeated interactions are essential for interpersonal trust. People do not place their trust in a stranger very often. However, knowledge may not be so critical for role-based trust or societal trust. We don't have to know a service provider well before we initiate a business transaction. We have confidence in our legal system without knowledge of the parties involved. Those various bases may result in different forms of trust, such as deterrence-based trust, knowledge-based trust, identification-based trust (Shapiro, Sheppard & Cheraskin, 1992), institution-based trust (Shapiro, 1987) calculus-based trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995), and identity-based trust (Kramer, Brewer & Hanna, 1996). A model of trust must be able to accommodate the variety of bases of trust.

CONCEPTUALIZING TRUST

On the basis of extensive literature review, we propose trust is a relational construct, which reflects one's psychological state and involves conscious decision or choice.

Psychological

Despite divergence in particular conceptualizations, most authors agree that, whatever else its essential features, trust is fundamentally a psychological state. Recall the common usage of the word "trust." When we say that we have trust in someone or something, we refer to a psychological state of ours that may involve cognitive, affective, and behavioral components according to the understanding of trust furnished by the current literature.

As we discussed above, many theorists conceive trust as expectancy about other people and their behavior; thus, it is primarily viewed as cognition by nature. Barber (1983) characterized trust as a set of "socially learned and socially confirmed expectations that people have of each other, of the organizations and institutions in which they live, and of the natural and moral social orders that set the fundamental understandings for their lives" (p.164-65).

Although acknowledging the importance of cognitive correlates of trust, other researchers also regard trust as having affective and motivational components (McAllister, 1995; Lewis & Weigert, 1985). The affective component embodies aspects of the "world of cultural meanings, emotional responses, and social relations... one not only thinks trust, but feels trust," (Fine & Holyfield, 1996, p 25).

Relational

Trust entails perceived vulnerability that is derived from one's uncertainty regarding the motives, intentions, and prospective actions of others (Kramer et al., 1996). Without the involvement of others trust would not come into play. A number of researchers have suggested that an adequate theory of trust must incorporate systematically the social and relational dimensions of trust (Mayer et al. 1995, McAllister, 1995, Tyler & Kramer, 1996). We adopt this relational view of trust. We agree with Kramer et al. (1996), research on trust should place emphasis on social rather than purely instrumental motives driving trust behavior, including consideration of how actors' self-presentational concerns and identity-related needs and motives influence trust-related cognition and choice. In addition we argue that trust comes into play when and only when relationships with others are involved. That is the relationship itself should be the focus when it comes to studying trust, not the particular discrete transaction, whether it be economic or social.

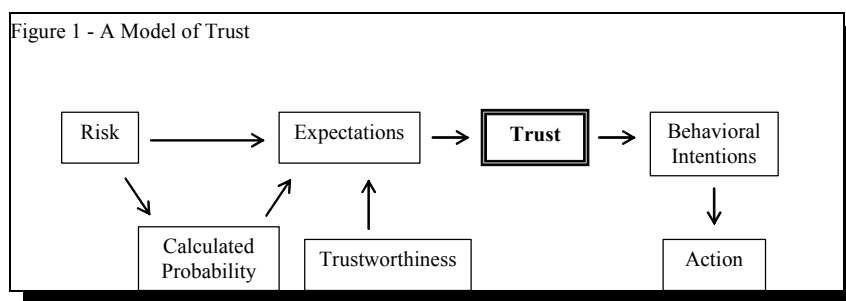
Choice

Think of how we use the word "trust" again. Often time, we use the word as a verb rather than a noun; thus, we refer to something we do that involves a decision or choice among potential alternative course of actions. You may or may not buy a used car that may turn out to be a lemon. You may or may not hire a baby-sitter for the evening and leave him or her unsupervised. You may

or may not agree to be operated on by a doctor with whom you are least familiar. When we choose to "trust" or "not trust" in a person or an organization, we are making a choice, a decision and in most cases the choice manifests itself and can be observed.

Viewing trust as choice behavior has its support in the extant literature. For example, many researchers argue for the usefulness of conceptualizing trust in terms of individuals' choice behavior (Kreps, 1990; Miller, 1992; March, 1994). An advantage of conceptualizing trust in terms of choice is that decisions often involve observable behaviors. In fact viewing trust as rational choice has become the dominant perspective in the economic and sociological literature. As Williamson (1993) argues, decisions about trust are similar to other forms of risky choice; individuals are presumed to be motivated to make rational, efficient choices (i.e. to maximize expected gains or minimize expected losses from their transactions). The observable behaviors resulting from these choices enable those involved in these lines of research to empirically test their theories.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1989), trust can be defined as "confidence in or reliance on some quality or attribute of a person or thing, or the truth of a statement." The definition apparently direct us to the critical role of confidence in trusting behavior, which leads us to define trust as a decision/choice of placing our confidence. That is, to trust or not to trust refers to whether or not to put our confidence in other persons, or groups, or institutions. Defined this way, trust is a conscientious choice, a decision, regardless of whether it is calculative or relational in nature.



A MODEL OF TRUST

We propose a model of trust (figure 1) which considers trust as a multi-dimensional psychological construct with a variety of bases. Trust is preceded by expectations, which in turn are a function of perceived risk, anticipations of the outcomes associated with a specific situation, and perceived trustworthiness of the party involved. Trust is followed by behavioral intent and ultimately by actions.

Perceived Risk

The model begins with risk. Previous research suggests that risk is a condition for trust to exist. Luhmann (1979) maintains, trust is about risk, and risk is about the choice to expose oneself to a situation where the possible damage may be greater than the advantage that is sought. This stipulation is crucial because, without it, whatever risks one faces are within the acceptable limits of rational choice, and trust plays no part in the decision to proceed. Deutsch (1960) suggests that a decision to trust is made in situations characterized by a course of future action that is ambiguous, outcomes that depend on the behavior of others, and greater consequences of a harmful event than of a beneficial event. More recent conceptualizations of trust holds that without a situation in which the possible damage may be greater than the advantage one seeks, it would simply be a matter of rational calculation where the risks remain within acceptable limits. "Without vulnerability, trust is unnecessary because outcomes are inconsequential for the trustor" (Moorman, et al. 1992, p 82.)

Apparently, perceived risk will have significant impact on the choice of whether to trust or not to trust. This impact is mediated by expectancy. Specifically, when perceived risk is high, or the ambiguity of the situation involved is high, one's expectation of the other's future behavior or the occurrence of a future event become less certain, which probably lead to low expectancy for the positive outcomes. In contrast, when faced a less ambiguous situation, one may have higher expectancy of positive outcome.

Although risk is important to trust, willingness to take a risk may not be an antecedent of trust. Trust will typically be relevant when at least one party is free to disappoint the other, free enough to avoid a risky relationship, and constrained enough to consider that relationship an attractive option. However, trust is "an attitude" that allows for risk-taking decision. Without trust, risk is avoided (Meyerson, et al. 1996). That is, taking risk can be a result of trust, but not a determinant of trust. One can choose to not trust to avoid perceived risk. This is especially true when the perceived risk does not involve the indeterminacy arising from not having foreknowledge of another's actions.

In short, risk is relevant to trust, but trust itself is not the willingness to take risk. In contrast, trust serves the purpose of reducing uncertainty and facilitating decision making in a risky situation. Individuals make a trusting choice when they confront an ambiguous choice situation in which the negative consequences are stronger than the positive consequences, but individual believes that the probability of the positive consequences outweighs the probability of the negative ones.

Calculated Probability

The dominant view of trust in economics conceives trust as a calculated probability, given the assumption that each party to the exchange aims to maximize self-interest (gain). Gambetta (1988) argues, trust is a particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses

that another agent will perform a particular action, both before he can monitor such action and in a context in which it affects his own action (p. 217). Deutsch (1973) proposed that decisions to act trustingly could be accounted for by understanding the relative strengths of positive and negative motivational consequences (outcomes) that would derive from choices in an ambiguous situation and the subjective probabilities that those consequences would actually occur. Similarly, Williamson points out, "At this level trust is an ongoing, market-oriented, economic calculation whose value is derived by comparing the outcomes resulting from creating and sustaining the relationship to the costs of maintaining or severing it." This transactional view of trust is based on concepts used to describe the economic behavior of actors in a firm (Williamson, 1975). The transactional view suggests that trust, precisely calculus-based trust, may be derived by determining benefits and costs to be derived from 1) staying in the relationship; and 2) cheating on the relationship.

Although trust should not be conceived as solely transactional, calculated probability about a future event or others' behavior is essential for our expectation. Our expectations about others depend on how we perceive the other party. If the perceived probability of the other's keeping a promise is high, we expect a positive outcome. Otherwise, it is less likely that we will hold high expectation of the positive future event. Therefore, the calculated probability will have direct impact on expectation.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness has been widely viewed as an antecedent of trust. It refers to the characteristics of the trustee, including perceived role performance competence, reliability, benevolent intention, and so on. It is worth noting that trustworthiness is different from trust. Trustworthiness concerns the characteristics of trustee and perceived trustworthiness is a belief about the trustee. In contrast, trust is trustor's characteristics and it may or may not be based on his/her perception of the trustee. However, the perceived trustworthiness of trustee influences one's expectations regarding the trustee. For example, if a person is perceived as competent in doing her job, it is likely we would expect her to do a job well. Similarly, if she is perceived as caring and concerned for our welfare, we would expect benevolent behavior from her.

An important difference between perceived trustworthiness and other determinants of expectations lie in the fact that perceived trustworthiness relies on one's knowledge of the person to be trusted. In other words, trust that is based on expectations determined by perceived trustworthiness is knowledge-based trust. Trust established as such is more likely to be attitudinal than situational. Furthermore, perceived trustworthiness will have impact on one's expectation across various situations.

Expectation

Expectation is a belief about what is to happen. Many definitions, especially those that focus on future events, view trust as expectation of the trustee's future behavior. Lewicki and Bunker (1995) define trust as a state involving confident positive expectations about another's motives regarding oneself in situations of risk. These expectations may be based on the rewards or punishments that guide the others' behavior (i.e., calculus-based trust), the predictability of the other's behaviors (i.e., knowledge-based trust), or a full internalization of the other's desires and intentions (i.e., identification-based trust). Unlike perceived trustworthiness, expectation is a cognition of the trustor although it may be determined by perceived trustworthiness of the trustee.

Frequently, researchers define trust as expectation as we discussed previously. However, in the model we view expectations as an antecedent of trust because we believe trust is more than just a cognitive expectancy. Many scholars have argued that a behavioral dimension is essential for trust, in that one party does not trust another until a personal relationship is established (Barber, 1983). Expectation that the trustee will behave in a benevolent manner, or that the trustee will perform her role in a competent manner will certainly contribute to one's trust. However, trust involves behavioral component and is not merely judgment or an expectation of the other party's future behavior. For example, Lewis and Weigert (1985) argue that trust is not mere predictability of the other's behavior, but confidence in the face of risk. According to Deutsch (1960), trust exists when resulting behavior of the trusting person demonstrates reliance on this uncertain information.

Behavioral intent and actions

The choice of placing one's confidence in another will affect one's behavioral intentions. When we have confidence in a salesperson, our purchase intention of a used car may become higher, and consequently we may be more likely to a buyer of a used car from this particular salesman. In contrast, when we mistrust a salesperson, we may refrain ourselves from making a purchases demonstrating a low tendency to make a purchase.

In a more general level, as we argued previously, having trust in a party will enhance our willingness to take risk. When trust is absent, risk is avoided. In addition, trust has been shown to facilitate cooperation as well as other trusting behavior (Gambetta, 1988; Deutsch 1960). Thus, in the model presented above, behavioral intent and actions are viewed as being determined by trust.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

To sum up, we regard trust as a behavioral construct; to trust is to place one's confidence in the other party in a relationship. Trust is preceded by cone's expectation of a future event, especially of how another party will behave. Perceived trustworthiness of the party, risk and calculated

probability may affect one's expectation that in turn can determine one's choice of whether to trust or not to trust. Such a decision or choice may lead to both instrumental and psychological outcomes as consequences of trust, including highly social and emotional outcomes. The model presented here describes the relationships among these key constructs that frequently appear in the current literature. By differentiating expectation and behavioral intention (willingness to take risk) from trust itself, this model attempts to clarify the confusions regarding the nature of trust. In addition, we expect our preliminary work will facilitate research on trust building process as well as on impacts trust may have on cooperative and trusting behavior.

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COMMUNICATION AND MISCOMMUNICATION IN CORPORATE AMERICA: EVIDENCE FROM FORTUNE 200 FIRMS

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ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of vice presidents of **Fortune** 200 companies concerning selected communication practices and miscommunication in their companies. To accumulate relevant data, an appropriate questionnaire consisting of open-ended as well as check-indicator types of questions was mailed to two vice presidents at each of the **Fortune** 200 companies. A total of 81 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 20 percent. The results showed that miscommunication can be very costly. As a result, a majority of the vice presidents surveyed indicated that their companies provide communication training for employees. Paperwork appears to increase for companies that did not provide communication training. Communication effectiveness was given significant consideration in the performance evaluation of employees. Oral/spoken communication was the prevailing source of communication errors, and e-mail was identified as the media form most involved in communication miscues. The vice presidents reported more miscommunication involving internal stakeholders, compared to external constituents. Specifically, interaction among business functions contributed to communication mistakes. Increased coverage of the importance of cross functional interactions in organizations, especially at the undergraduate level, by schools of business appears to be warranted by the findings of this study.*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the lifeblood of organizations. Without effective communication, organizations will drift without direction like a ship without a rudder. With effective communication, organizations help empower their employees to succeed and accomplish organizational goals. **Fortune** magazine conducts an annual survey to determine the 100 best companies to work for in the United States. Invariably, the companies identified as being best do an excellent job of listening to employee input, which helps these companies to keep highly skilled

workers. One company, Southwest Airlines, has consistently been at or near the top of the list of 100 best companies identified by **Fortune**. In a recent interview with Colleen Barrett, President and COO of Southwest Airlines, Barrett was asked to account for the success of Southwest. Barrett's response was, "You have to talk and talk and talk to your people all the time." (Gittell, 2001) In recent research on what companies could do to improve retention, employees made it clear that they highly valued managers who would listen. (HR Focus, 2001)

Beyond understanding the need to engage in appropriate forms of communication interactions, organizations should also consider the extent to which communication training is offered to employees and realize that effective communication skills can influence superior-subordinate relationships, employee performance evaluations, and employee job satisfaction. This study examines these issues in relationship to reported forms of miscommunication by company vice presidents in **Fortune** 200 companies.

The paper consists of four additional sections. The next section reviews relevant literature regarding communication and miscommunication in Corporate America. Section three includes a description of methodology followed in development of the study. A summary of results is included in section four. Finally, implications and conclusions are presented in section five.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indeed, communication is a vital component of organizational effectiveness. Due to an increasingly global marketplace, the pressure to accomplish more with fewer resources, and the need to exceed customer expectations, managers recognize the merits of effective communication: sharing meaning and minimizing communication errors. (Axley, 2000; Gordon, 1998; and Van Der Velde, Jansen, and Vinkenbug, 1999) New technology that increases the number and speed of messages that require the attention of employees emphasizes the need for clear and accurate communication in organizations.

Increasingly, businesses are characterized by flatter organizational structures, with the erosion of mid-management positions leading to fewer support-staff personnel. As a result, there is increased use of electronic technology to coordinate the flow of work in organizations. (Fulk and DeSanctis, 1995). Adopting to these changes and the increase in communication activities consumes vast amount of managerial time. CMA Management (2000) confirmed that managers spend about 80 percent of their time on communication.

Gillette (1994) observed that management communication involves both vertical and horizontal dimensions and also noted the importance of supplementing e-mail, information on policies, and progress reports with personal interactions. Morrow (1982) studied feedback in federated nonprofit organizations and found that horizontal feedback was positively related to goal attainment, superordinate approval, and lateral approval. Vertical feedback was positively related only to goal attainment.

Communication involving various managerial functions represents an integral aspect of organizational effectiveness. The need to provide essential information to all parts of an organization has become a great challenge. Marion (1998), for example, acknowledged the importance of providing communication to serve both overall fully-integrated strategies as well as small business units, which need relevant professional services. In an effort to learn how to improve communication in organizations, Griffin and Hauser (1992) surveyed differences between product-development teams with one team using a phase-review process and the other a (QFD) quality-function-deployment. The QFD approach had a positive impact and enabled members to communicate directly without “up-over-down” flows of information through management.

Effective management is essential for the survival and growth of any organization. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were many mergers and acquisitions. A key factor related to the success or failure of these business combinations was effective communication. (HR Focus, 2000) Interestingly, however, fewer than 60 percent of respondent human relations executives were involved in activities such as communicating strategies to employees, planning/leading integration efforts, or helping a new entity cope with change. Not surprisingly, Paterson (2000) reported that many firms simply do not devote sufficient attention to communication with employees early enough in the merger process.

It is common for organization to spend a lot of money training employees. In 2001, for example, Motorola anticipated spending \$20-27 million on electronic learning (Eure, 2001). However, according to Smeltzer and Fann (1993), managers surveyed at large firms and entrepreneurial companies indicated that management development programs should focus on the role of organizational differences, not general communication mandates. Seibold, Kudsi, and Rude (1993) reported that communication training does make a difference. Supervisor and co-worker ratings of presentation skills studied improved for 12 of 16 skills that were measured.

Several studies considered the perception concerning the role of communication in job satisfaction. Callan (1993) examined supervisor-subordinate perceptions involving the relationship between communication and job satisfaction. For significant comparisons, employee job satisfaction was higher in circumstances involving more opportunities for discussion with superiors, greater recognition of personal views, and more frequent self-disclosure opportunities. Downs and Hazen (1977) recognized the multidimensional construct nature of “communication satisfaction” and concluded that personal feedback, relationships with supervisors, and communication climate were most relevant communication dimensions that interacted with job satisfaction. Alexander, Helms, and Wilkins (1989) found that organization and job information as well as explanations of rationales for decisions positively impacted performance and satisfaction of vocational rehabilitation personnel.

Various studies considered the role of communication in superior-subordinate relationships (Hatfield and Huseman, 1982; Richmond and Roach, 1992; and Waldron, 1991). Eisenberg, Monge, and Farace (1984) found that greater levels of agreement on rules of initiation and termination for

communication between supervisors or subordinates led higher evaluations of each other. Similarly, Wexley, Alexander, Greenawalt, and Couch (1980) concluded that managers who were more cognizant of subordinates' work attitudes tended to give them more positive evaluations. Also, greater congruence by subordinates toward attitudes of managers led to increased satisfaction with supervision administered by them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a questionnaire consisting of open-ended as well as check-indicator types of questions. The initial draft was submitted to administrative and faculty colleagues who suggested content revisions. The revised questionnaire (Appendix A), which was mailed to two vice presidents at each of the **Fortune** 200 companies, was designed to solicit information regarding communication and miscommunication by Corporate America and the existence of communication training programs. Eighty-one completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 20 percent. Eight returned surveys were not usable for various reasons.

The questionnaire asked respondents to identify their job titles, type of communication where miscommunication was likely to occur, most and least proficient communication methods, and number of hours to resolve miscommunication problems. The questionnaire also asked whether the firm provided communication training and whether there was a specific position responsible for communication training. Also, survey participants were asked to identify the level of management most likely to miscommunicate, the educational level of persons most apt to cause miscommunication, and the business function most responsible for communication mistakes. Finally, the questionnaire asked about specific sources of communication, most used methods of communication, and the importance of employee communication skills in performance evaluation.

RESULTS

Respondents included 58 (72 percent) VPs of management and 23 (28 percent) VPs of other areas such as finance, accounting, and information technology. Results of the survey showed that 53 (66 percent) persons reported miscommunication most often occurred in oral/spoken communication, followed by 32 (40 percent) responses indicating written communication, and 8 (10%) individuals noting nonverbal body communication. When asked specifically, 47 percent of respondents identified e-mail as the media responsible for the most miscommunication. Next, respondents were asked to identify the most proficient and least proficient ways that employees expressed themselves. While 43 percent identified written communication to be the least proficient method of communication, 59 percent reported their employees were most proficient with oral/spoken.

The next area involved asking respondents how many hours they spent resolving problems arising from miscommunication. The reason for asking the question was to gain insight into the cost of miscommunication. If time is money, then spending time in resolving these problems will cost Corporate America. Sixty-one percent of the survey participants reported they spent less than 5 hours per week, and 30 percent reported they spent from 6 to 10 hours per week resolving communication issues.

When asked if the firm provided communication training to employees, 45 (56 percent) persons responded “yes,” and 35 (44 percent) respondents indicated that their firms did not provide such training. This was interesting considering the size of the participating corporations. We also asked participants to estimate the amount of annual spending on communication training. Respondents estimated expenses ranged from less than \$25,000 to \$5-\$10 million annually. Then, we asked whether there was a specific job position responsible for communication training. Sixty-eight percent responded negatively, while 32 percent indicated they had such a position. Most popular position titles responsible for communication training included VP of Public Affairs, Director of Corporate Human Resources, and Manager of Learning Development.

The next area dealt with the issue of a “paperless” business world. Interestingly, 34 percent noted the amount of the paperwork was decreasing, and 56 percent indicated either the same or a greater amount of paperwork. The next area of questioning asked about the level of management that committed the most miscommunication. Fifty-three percent stated middle-level managers; 22 percent indicated upper-level managers, and 18 percent noted lower-level managers. Ninety-six percent reported miscommunication occurred with internal constituents.

The vice presidents were asked which type of communication they used to the greatest extent. Not surprisingly, e-mail was the most used method of communication. Fifty-eight percent of respondents identified e-mail as the most widely used method of communication followed by telephone calls (27 percent), oral presentations (10 percent), and written letters and memos (5 percent).

The next question asked the vice presidents about the importance of communication skills in performance evaluation of employees. Seventy-five percent concluded that it was very important; 14 percent considered it to be important; 10 percent said it was somewhat important; and 1 percent indicated it was not important. When asked the level of education of people most likely to miscommunicate, 41 percent reported persons with a bachelor's degree; 19 percent responded those with a master's degree; 10 percent considered individuals with a high school diploma; and 5 percent indicated persons without a high school diploma. Interestingly, 25 percent of participants did not consider education an issue related to communication. This result was not surprising considering VPs interacted with middle-level managers who were more likely to possess at least a bachelor degree.

A final question asked which business function was likely to commit miscommunication. Seventy-one percent reported that it occurred in the interaction between functions, and 19 percent

reported management. This is thought provoking since many accreditation agencies emphasize inclusion of cross functional learning experiences in graduate-level business programs.

Table 1: Statistical Summary					
Variable	No. of Resp.	% *	Variable	No. of Resp.	% *
Position:			Who do we mis-comm. with?		
Management	58	72	Internal constituents	74	96
Other	23	28	External constituents	3	4
Type of Miscommunication:			Level of mgt. that miscomm.:		
Oral/Spoken	53	66	Upper-level	18	22
Written	32	40	Middle-level	43	53
Nonverbal body	8	10	Lower-level	15	18
			Other	8	10
Type of miscommunication:			Methods of communications:		
E-Mail	37	47	E-Mail	46	57
Oral presentations/meetings	18	23	Face-to-face	34	42
Telephone calls	17	22	Teleconference	1	1
Written letters and memos	9	12	Web-based communication	0	0
Other	13	17	Other	0	0
Most Proficient:			Sources of communication:		
Oral/spoken communication	47	59	E-mail messages	46	58
Written communication	30	38	Telephone calls	22	27
Nonverbal body comm.	5	6	Written letters and memos	4	5
Least Proficient:			Oral presentations	8	10
Oral/spoken communication	26	33	Other	0	0
Written communication	34	43			
Nonverbal body comm.	22	22			
Hours/week resolving problems arising from miscommunication:			Importance of communication skills in performance evaluation:		
Less than 5 hours per week	49	61	Very Important	60	75
6 to 10 hours per week	24	30	Important	11	14
11 to 15 hours per week	3	4	Somewhat important	8	10
16 or more hours per week	4	5	Not important	1	1
Communication training:			Who commits most miscomm.:		
Yes	45	56	Without high school diploma	4	5
No	35	44	High school graduates	7	10
Job position responsible for training:			With bachelor degree	30	41
Yes	26	32	With masters degree	14	19
No	55	68	Other	18	25

Variable	No. of Resp.	% *	Variable	No. of Resp.	% *
Amount of paperwork:			Which business function commits miscommunication the most?		
Increasing substantially	12	15	Accounting/finance	2	3
Increasing	13	16	Management	15	19
Unchanged/remain the same	20	25	Marketing	3	4
Decreasing	28	34	Information technology	3	4
Decreasing substantially	9	11	Interaction between functions	55	71

* Percentages may total more than 100% due to inclusion of multiple responses.

OTHER STATISTICS

The chi-square non-parametric test was used to determine whether various relationships were statistically significant. Table 2 presents a summary of calculated values for various chi-square tests involving communication variables. Variables tested include position within the firm (VP of Management vs. other VPs), importance of employees' communication skills in performance evaluation, education level of employees who are most likely to commit miscommunication, and the perception of trends toward "paperless" world of business. While a lack of significance was noted for the majority of calculations, several significant relationships were apparent.

Vice presidents of management were more likely to notice the nonverbal/body miscommunication than other vice presidents. Actually, they were almost three times more likely to note that their employees were least proficient at expressing themselves using nonverbal body communication. While 38 percent of Management VPs felt that the paperwork was decreasing, 62 percent of other VPs felt it was decreasing.

The importance of employee communication skills in the performance evaluation was tested. VPs who felt employee communication skills were important or very important were less likely to believe miscommunication most often occurred in nonverbal body communication. VPs who felt employee communication skills were very important or not important were more likely to identify oral presentations/meetings as miscommunication than those who felt it was important or somewhat important. VPs who felt employees skills were important or very important tended to be more likely to have a job position responsible for communication training. Finally, VPs who felt employee communication skills were important or very important were more likely to select telephone calls as the source of communication consuming the most amount of time.

VPs felt that employees with high school diploma were more likely to commit miscommunication through e-mail messages. Companies having a job position to train employees in communication were more likely to identify employees without high school diplomas to commit

the most miscommunication at their firms. VPs who felt miscommunication was committed by employees with master's or bachelor's degrees were more likely to indicate that it occurred at middle-level and upper-level management positions. VPs who felt employee communication skills were very important were more likely to identify employees with bachelor's and master's degrees as a source for miscommunication. VPs who believed employees with high school diplomas committed the most miscommunication felt that it occurred in a cross-functional environment with other employees.

Finally, the impact of VPs' perception of the trend toward “paperless” world of business was tested. Thirty-eight percent of VPs of management felt that the paperwork was decreasing, compared to 62 percent of other VPs. One-hundred percent of VPs who reported the amount of paperwork at their firm was decreasing considered that nonverbal body communication was not a problem, while 16 percent of the VPs who reported an increase in the amount of paperwork felt their employees miscommunicated by nonverbal body method.

Of respondents who thought miscommunication most often occurred in nonverbal body communication, 50 percent reported the paperwork was increasing or increasing substantially. The remaining 50 percent felt the amount of paperwork at their firms was not changing. On the other hand, VPs who felt their employees did not miscommunicate nonverbally, 28 percent reported an increase in paperwork; 21 percent felt the paperwork was not changing; and 51 percent reported a decrease in paperwork.

Sixty-two percent of companies that had job position responsible for communication training reported the amount of paperwork at their firms to be decreasing or decreasing substantially, compared to 27 percent who reported the paperwork was increasing or increasing substantially. Seventy-two percent of VPs who reported the amount of paperwork was increasing or increasing substantially did not have a position responsible for communication training.

Table 2: Summary of Calculated Chi-Square Values for Selected Variables

Variables	Position (χ^2)		Performance Evaluation (χ^2)		Education (χ^2)		Perception about “Paperless” (χ^2)	
	Value	Prob	Value	Prob	Value	Prob	Value	Prob
Position	N/A	N/A	4.4435	.2174	9.3079	.1570	12.719	.0262 **
Types of Mis-comm:								
Oral/Spoken	1.3663	.2424	3.2033	.3613	7.7729	.2552	9.2172	.1007 *
Written	0.8238	.3641	4.1769	.2430	6.8245	.3374	5.6632	.3404
Nonverbal Body	3.5867	.0582 *	8.1155	.0437 **	2.6979	.8457	9.6559	.0856 *

Table 2: Summary of Calculated Chi-Square Values for Selected Variables

Variables	Position (χ^2)		Performance Evaluation (χ^2)		Education (χ^2)		Perception about "Paperless" (χ^2)	
	Value	Prob	Value	Prob	Value	Prob	Value	Prob
Media of Mis-comm:								
E-Mail	2.3608	.1244	1.4302	.6985	10.644	.1000 *	5.5689	.3504
Written letters/memos	1.0947	.2954	3.3637	.3389	13.361	.0376 **	1.8146	.8742
Telephone calls	0.3711	.5424	0.5304	.9122	4.3650	.6274	4.9053	.4276
Oral presentations	1.8498	.1738	10.397	.0155 **	4.9584	.5492	5.0730	.4070
Other	0.3083	.5787	2.9690	.3964	8.4989	.2038	4.8396	.4358
Most proficient	3.3189	.5060	9.5749	.6532	11.272	.9869	36.087	.0150 **
Training	2.1396	.1435	1.6490	.6483	6.7553	.3441	7.5759	.1812
Job responsible for training	1.5816	.2085	6.9723	.0728 *	10.894	.0917 *	14.728	.0116 **
Paperless	12.719	.0262 **	12.019	.6775	25.942	.6781	N/A	N/A
Level of Management	4.7124	.4520	10.068	.8154	48.641	.0171 **	15.381	.9320
Sources of Comm:								
E-Mail	2.5617	.6336	7.6780	.8098	9.4240	.9965	15.178	.7661
Telephone calls	6.5084	.1643	23.284	.0254 **	20.173	.6869	27.660	.1177
Written letters/memos	3.4849	.6257	16.813	.3302	19.299	.9335	25.479	.4358
Oral presentations	3.1393	.5348	14.137	.2920	20.919	.6435	21.305	.3793
Other	0.4317	.8058	9.9710	.1259	9.1239	.6923	6.5736	.7650
Methods of Comm:								
Teleconference	2.5977	.6272	7.4258	.8282	13.538	.9564	34.902	.0206 **
Web-based	1.4849	.8293	5.8350	.9242	21.757	.5938	24.968	.2026
E-Mail	3.5607	.1686	4.3004	.6361	17.883	.1193	10.307	.4140
Face-to-face	5.0156	.1707	7.1100	.6257	17.757	.4717	14.257	.5061
Other	4.5332	.3386	2.5571	.9979	17.206	.8397	14.575	.8001
Performance Evaluation	4.4435	.2174	N/A	N/A	26.694	.0849 *	12.019	.6775
Business functions	6.8285	.1452	5.4045	.9431	36.262	.0518 *	19.684	.4778
* Significant at 10% level ** Significant at 5% level *** Significant at 1% level								

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study surveyed the views of **Fortune** 200 vice presidents on how good employee communication skills impact critical issues associated with the success of their organizations. Specifically, the vice presidents reported that in their organizations miscommunication most often

occurs in oral/spoken interactions, when compared to written communication and communication through nonverbal body language. When more individualized forms of interaction were examined, e-mail was identified as the media form most responsible for miscommunication. Compared to written and nonverbal body communication, employees for the companies appeared to make the most frequent use of oral/spoken method of expressing themselves and perceived that to be the method at which they are most skilled.

Not only do organizations experience miscommunication, they also found that mistakes and errors that occur due to miscommunication can be very costly. As a result, a majority of the vice presidents indicated that their companies provide communication training for employees. Interestingly, for companies that provided communication training, the amount of paperwork reported was unchanged or decreasing. However, for companies that did not provide communication training, the amount of paperwork was increasing. Furthermore, a majority of the vice presidents indicated that an employee's ability to communicate well plays a very important role in performance evaluation. Actually, many employees may be surprised at how important of a role communication skills play in their performance evaluation. Since upper-level management values good communication so highly, middle-level management must also appreciate the importance of demonstrating effective communication skills. As a sign of advances in technology in companies, the vice presidents indicated that e-mail was the most used method of communication in their organizations.

Many vice presidents would agree that middle-level managers have some of the most challenging and demanding jobs in today's organizations. Their role as a linking pin among sometimes diverse groups in companies puts them in various situations where the risk for miscommunication is high. In addition, middle-level managers typically lack the valuable experience gained by vice presidents in companies. As a result, survey results showed the vice presidents indicated that middle-level management created the most miscommunication in their companies. Compared to external constituents, the vice presidents reported that they believe most miscommunication in their companies occurred with internal constituents. We have to wonder, however, how the employees of these companies suddenly become so good at avoiding miscommunication when interacting with external constituents when they experience so much miscommunication while interacting with internal constituents. Perhaps, this finding was because vice presidents may not be as likely to know about miscommunication that occurs with external constituents, as compared to miscommunication with internal constituents

Most of the vice presidents surveyed reported that the interaction between business functions created miscommunication in their organizations. Interestingly, AACSB-International guidelines require that business schools address the importance of cross functional interactions in graduate programs, but coverage of this topic is optional at the undergraduate level. Perhaps, based on the findings of this research, coverage of the importance of cross functional interactions in organizations should also be an AACSB-International requirement for undergraduate programs in accredited

business school curriculums. At the undergraduate level, inclusion of this coverage will enhance the understanding that an organization is more than a sum of its parts.

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Appendix A
Survey Instrument

1. Which of the following areas represent your current position?
 Accounting Management Marketing Finance
 Information technology Other (Please specify) _____

2. In which of the following types of communication does miscommunication most often occur at your firm?
 Oral/Spoken communication Written Communication
 Nonverbal body communication

3. At my firm, miscommunication most often occurs through:
 E-mail messages Written letters and memos
 Telephone calls Oral presentations/meetings
 Other: (Please specify) _____

4. At my firm, people are most proficient at expressing themselves through:
 Oral/Spoken communication Written Communication
 Nonverbal body communication

5. At my firm, people are least proficient at expressing themselves through:
 Oral/Spoken communication Written Communication
 Nonverbal body communication

6. How many hours per week do you spend resolving problems arising from miscommunication?
 Less than 5 6-10
 11-15 16 or more

7. Does your firm provide communication training to employees? Yes No.
 If yes, approximately how much do you estimate your firm spends per year on communication training? \$ _____

8. Is there a job position responsible for communication training at your firm? Yes No.
 If "yes", what is the title of the position? (Please specify) _____

9. Much has been said about evolving toward a "paperless" world of business. What is happening to the amount of paperwork at your firm? (Please check one response)
 Increasing substantially Increasing
 Unchanged/remaining about the same Decreasing
 Decreasing substantially

10. Which level of management creates the most miscommunication at your firm?
 Upper level management Middle level management
 Lower level management Other (Please specify) _____
11. In terms of miscommunication, who does your firm miscommunicate with the most?
 Internal constituents External constituents
- If external constituents, which group does your firm miscommunicate with the most?
 Customers and potential customers Suppliers and potential suppliers
 Creditors and potential creditors Investors and potential investors
 Regulatory agencies Other (please specify) _____
12. Please rank the following based on the amount of time that you spend on each of the following sources of communication (1 being the most amount of time, 2 being the second most amount of time, etc.).
 E-mail messages Telephone calls
 Written letters and memos Oral presentations
 Other: (Please specify) _____
13. Please rank the following methods of communication based on how much you use them (1 being the most amount of time, 2 being the second most amount of time, etc.).
 Teleconference Web-based communication (chat rooms)
 E-mail Face-to-face
 Other (Please specify) _____
14. Based on your firm's performance evaluation guidelines, how important are employees' communication skills?
 Very important Important
 Somewhat important Not important
15. In terms of education level, who commits the most miscommunication in your firm?
 Individuals without high school diploma High school graduates
 Individuals with bachelor degree Other _____
 Individuals with masters degree (Please specify)
16. In which of the following business functions does miscommunication occur most often at your firm?
 Accounting/finance Management
 Marketing Information technology
 Interaction between functional areas

A MEETING PLANNING PROJECT: A MAJOR COMPONENT IN DEVELOPING TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATIVE WRITING SKILLS

Virginia Hemby, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Bill McPherson, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Wayne Moore, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Linda F. Szul, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Dawn Woodland, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Kelly Wilkinson, University of Missouri-Columbia

ABSTRACT

This document studies and determines if students are being provided with skills necessary to succeed in business and teamwork, collaborative writing, and group projects. The study was performed at a state supported Mid-Atlantic University using eight sections of Business and Interpersonal Communication.

In the following sections, we explore the various aspects of business and teamwork, collaborative writing, and group projects. First, we discuss the purpose of the study, introducing the three research questions necessary to provide the focus for the study. Next, we present the literature review, which contains information regarding collaborative writing, cooperative learning, meetings, caveats about small groups, and simulation.

Further, we discuss the methodology, including the target population and the project description. Then the reactions and implications include student responses from each business communication section. We conclude the document with recommendations which include information necessary to replicate the project.

INTRODUCTION

In today's Total Quality Management atmosphere, the use of small groups and collaborative writing projects appears to be significant. Competent communicators have learned to work effectively in small groups to gather and analyze data and then to write and revise a written report or to prepare an oral presentation.

Regardless of the size of the organization, members must periodically divide into small groups to accomplish some objective. In fact, small groups might range from one-time, on-the-spot meetings to permanent committees; and in a business career, students as future employees, are likely to participate in collaborative writing projects. That is, they will work on a report with others. Group involvement in report preparations is becoming increasingly significant for a number of reasons. For one, the specialized knowledge of different people can improve the quality of the work. For another, the combined talents of the members are likely to produce a document better than could be done by any one of the members. Furthermore, dividing the work reduces the time needed for the project (Lesikar, Pettit, & Flatley, 2002).

Given organizational trends of the prevalence of teamwork, collaborative writing, and group projects, astute business communication instructors will want (and need) to provide these learning experiences for business communication students. This paper presents a group project for business communication classes that incorporates active learning, collaborative writing, teamwork, cooperative learning, and the group process.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of the study is to examine the business communication course and to determine if students are being provided with skills necessary to succeed in business and teamwork, collaborative writing, and group projects. The first step in the research process involved a review of literature to determine what types of group activities instructors could or should be utilizing in the classroom. The second step involved the development of a group project focusing on planning meetings. The third step was to assign the project to students enrolled in the Business and Interpersonal Communication course to determine their perceptions of the effectiveness of such a project. Following a review of the literature, the following questions guided the study:

1.	Are instructors who teach business communication courses providing students with skills necessary to succeed in business and teamwork, collaborative writing, and group projects?
2.	Does a meeting planning project in a business communication course teach students needed skill for success in business?
3.	What are students' perceptions of effectiveness of a group project focusing on planning a meeting?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative Communications

According to Ober (2003), the increasing quantity and complexity of the information available makes it difficult for any one person to have either the time or the expertise to analyze all data adequately. The differing skills of several individuals are often needed in a joint effort to analyze a given situation and to generate proposals or recommendations. Thus, collaborative writing and collaborative oral presentations are becoming quite prevalent in organizations. As a matter of fact, collaborative communications have always been much more common in organizations than many people realized.

Collaborative Writing

Lesikar (2002) has observed that whatever the career, the likelihood exists that some of the documents employees produce will be written within a group setting. Regardless of the size of the organization, members must periodically divide into small groups to accomplish an objective. Small groups range from one-time, on-the-spot ensembles to permanent committees. Ede and Lunsford (as cited in Locker, 2003) found that of the 700 professionals in 7 fields who responded to their survey, 87% sometimes wrote as members of a team or a group.

Collaboration is often prompted by one of the following situations:

1.	The task is too big or the time is too short for one person to do all the work.
2.	No one person has all the knowledge required to do the task.
3.	A group representing different perspectives must reach a consensus.
4.	The stakes for the task are so high that the organization wants the best efforts of as many people as possible; no one person wants the sole responsibility for the success or failure of the document.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning methods involve flexibility in student presentations and discussion. They allow for individual mastery and assessment while at the same time they encourage teamwork and recognition of the team's achievement. Effectiveness of these methods is measured both in significantly improved achievement for students at all ability levels and in development of social skills that facilitate positive interdependence in the classroom and other environments (Slavin, 1990).

The success of cooperative learning strategies in motivating students to learn derives from three important characteristics: group goals, individual accountability, and equal opportunities for success (Cooper, 1994). Group goals bring rewards for team success. Individuals improve in the context of the team. As in other classroom situations, all students are striving for mastery of targeted content, but their motivation to work hard is boosted by the possibility of a winning team. The learning gains of individual members form the basis of the team score that leads to public team recognition.

Meetings

Meetings are gatherings of two or more people for the purpose of discussing some aspect of an organization's work. Each meeting performs a function that contributes to the mission of the organization. Almost anything in organizational life can inspire a meeting; in fact, far too many needless meetings waste far too much time and money in every organization. Consider the following:

◆	"About 12 million meetings are held in North America every business day, at a cost of about \$45 billion a year.
◆	Approximately one-third of those meetings are considered unnecessary by the people who attend them, and 50 percent of any given meeting is considered a waste of time.
◆	About 80 percent of all meetings last for less than 30 minutes; 35 percent are for the exchange of information; 60 percent are for reasons that could be handled through other communication media.
◆	Executives spend an average of 16 hours a week in meetings, a total of 21 weeks per year.
◆	Executives paid \$45,000 a year earn an estimated \$18,500 of that amount just by attending meetings" (Crawford, and Ruch, 1991, p. 449).

The amount of information crossing a single business desk has soared more than 600 percent in the past 20 years, and many executives feel that the meeting is the best way to communicate with several people (Crawford, and Ruch,, 1991, p. 449). No meeting should be called unless the topic is important, can't wait, and requires an exchange of ideas. If the flow of information is strictly one way and no immediate feedback will result, then don't schedule a meeting. For example, if people are merely being advised or informed, send an e-mail, memo, or letter. Leave a telephone or voice mail message, but don't call a costly meeting. Remember, the real expense of a meeting is the lost productivity of all the people attending. To decide whether the purpose of the meeting is valid, it's a good idea to consult the key people who will be attending. Ask them what outcomes are desired

and how to achieve those goals. This consultation also sets a collaborative tone and encourages full participation (Guffey, 2003, p. 56).

Furthermore, Callahan and Clark (1988) write that the past dozen years have seen a growing awareness of the need for more and more sophisticated skills in participatory behavior and deeper insights into such phenomena. Employees have witnessed the proliferation of human relations workshops, group dynamics training sessions, encounter groups, sensitivity training, and similar efforts to recognize the drive for increased skill in human interaction.

Such efforts are vivid testimony to the fact that group participatory skills are learned skills, not innate skills. As a result of this and other research, evidence increasingly demonstrates that the school has a role to play in the development of social skills, both by encouragement of cognitive awareness and analysis and by experiential approaches. More and more instructors, therefore, are adding to their repertoire of instructional strategies a variety of techniques and procedures that provide students with opportunities to interact with one another. Such procedures also provide experience in analysis of group behavior and human interaction and the development of individual skills along those lines. The range of possibilities is wide and varied; to name only a few, there are debates, forums, panels, symposia, committee work, buzz sessions, small-group activities, and role playing.

Caveats about Small Groups

Groups must understand their roles and tasks--both assigned and assumed. Using small groups is challenging and stimulating, and groups create their own set of successes and failures. The instructor, most often, is the deciding factor between success and failure. Yet instructors' expectations of students' abilities lead to many of the problems. Instructors believe their students can handle any learning situation; so rather than introduce group work gradually, they give little thought to whether the new learning strategy can be understood and inculcated.

Students involved in group work usually have problems either with working together as a team or with uncovering the information needed to complete the project. First, instructors can facilitate the group process by serving as a sounding board and by deciding to reorganize the group if all else fails.

Second, instructors have to constantly re-enforce the process in discovery learning. Just when it appears students have understood, a new level may be reached that requires reiteration and reinforcement. Instructors can never assume that they have nothing else to do after groups have been assigned.

A helpful procedure the instructor might follow is to involve students in direct discussion of such problems as often as seems appropriate and desirable (Callahan et al., 1988). One objective of participatory experiences is to guide students toward the higher level of learning to analyze and

evaluate their own functioning and accomplishments. The better able students are to analyze and assess the problems they face, the more likely they will be to arrive at sensible solutions.

On the other hand, individual students can pose problems as well. Some students will not like group work, while others will see it as a way to achieve their own ends. Also some students will lack skills in cooperative learning. The instructor will have to mediate, to compromise, to guide and to make tough decisions.

Simulation

According to Callahan and Clark (1988), simulations can be useful for helping students to gain insights into difficult matters. The young, aspiring lawyer who tries a case in a simulated courtroom through a mock trial not only gains skill in legal practice but also gains insight into the applicability of the law in the case being tried. In the social studies classroom, the students simulating the management of a business are learning what happens when they overbuy, overprice, and make strategic errors. By taking roles in the simulated activity, the students, hopefully, will come to understand the real situation and how to act in it.

Simulations allow students to become involved in some enterprise; for example, to select certain options or risks and then to witness the results of their decisions. They can be prepared for almost any subject where a simulated experience for a certain real life situation contributes to increased learning.

Regardless of type of group activity mentioned in the literature, the goal of this project was to examine student perceptions of the effectiveness of a group project in building teamwork and collaborative writing skills. The group project selected encompasses skill development incorporating active learning, collaborative writing, teamwork, cooperative learning, and the group process.

METHODOLOGY

Population

The population for this study included 8 sections of Business Communication, each containing 25 students. A total of 200 students participated. Instructors created groups containing 5 students, resulting in 40 groups spread over the eight sections of Business Communication. Students must have achieved junior status prior to enrolling in the course; majors from all six departments in the college as well as majors from other departments across campus are scheduled into each section.

Project Description

The instructors, all faculty (at the time) in the Technology Support and Training Department, have collaborated on research projects and worked together on committee assignments. A spirit of cooperation prevails among the six faculty members. In addition, each is assigned at least one section of the communications course. Business & Interpersonal Communications is a required course in the core curriculum of the College of Business and Information Technology. Since a major focus of the class is group work and collaborative writing, we felt it was appropriate to cooperate as a team on a course project. Preparation for the group project, The Meeting Group Project, involved several steps. In the planning stages of the Meeting Group Project, the six instructors involved met to discuss the parameters of the proposed project design using tenants of organizational TQM and collaborative practices.

Following this discussion, the instructors developed a checklist of criteria to be included in the group project, The Meeting Planning Project (Figure 1). Student groups were required to submit a written paper and to make a 20-minute presentation to the class. Each group member participated in the class presentation and made a contribution to the group collaborative writing project. Each student group planned a seminar. The sample meeting/seminar could be utilized as a teaser for participants to come to the seminar. Students could, for instance, develop, plan and coordinate a seminar in a city of their choice-Apple Pickers of America Association Annual Meeting to be held in Seattle, WA. The planning team for the association (the student group) prepared an oral presentation highlighting guest speakers, planned activities and seminars, and information about the seminar site. Student groups had to decide what type of meeting/seminar they wanted to plan and where it was to be held.

Figure 1: Checklist of Criteria to be Included in the Seminar Planning Group Project	
Purpose:	Today, more than in the past, experts are stressing the importance of communications --particularly interpersonal skills involving interaction in groups. It is, therefore, essential to your success in the workplace to be able to function effectively as a member of a group.
Problem:	Your group has been asked to plan a two-day seminar. You will develop a complete presentation as members of the Subcommittee on the Planning for the Executive Board of an organization. You choose the organization, theme, target audience, and place.
Assignment:	Develop a complete promotion and communications package for your seminar.
Abstract for approval:	Develop a one-page proposal addressing purpose, theme, place, and audience. This abstract MUST BE turned in by 4th week of the semester. No proposal revisions will be accepted after the 7th week of the semester.

Figure 1: Checklist of Criteria to be Included in the Seminar Planning Group Project

Figure 1: Checklist of Criteria to be Included in the Seminar Planning Group Project	
Guidelines:	
§	<p>The project will be presented as both a formal keyed report and an oral report. The written project must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. a title page; B. a table of contents; C. an introduction; D. text to include: (1) planning grid, (2) discussion of your organizational culture, (3) discussion of communication channels used, theme, audience, place, and seminar promotion, (4) rationale for your selection of the items listed in number 3; E. communication tools including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. letterhead, 2. invitation to keynote speaker, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Keynote must be a real person with expertise b. Biography of speaker must be included 3. pre-seminar information brochure, 4. seminar announcement, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Good news letter to potential attendees b. Registration form 5. exhibitors, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Persuasive letter (inviting to attend and exhibit) b. Bad news letter (declining exhibitor's request to exhibit) 6. registration confirmation form, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Lodging and site information b. Refund policy 7. press release, 8. progress report (memorandum format) to Board, F. Other elements -MUST select at least ONE of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. commercial video to include a story board & script, 2. radio commercial to include a script, 3. promotional items, i.e: shirts, balloons, 4. participants' package consisting of name badge and program booklet 5. table decorations and menu for a meal function, 6. recreational activities, 7. socials, 8. pre-conference activities,
II.	All members of the group must take part in the 20-30 minute oral presentation illustrating professionalism and teamwork.
III.	The oral presentation must include visual aids.

With regard to the written report, the following was a list of those items that had to be included:

- A. a title page;
- B. a table of contents;
- C. an introduction;
- D. text to include: (1) planning grid, (2) discussion of your organizational culture, (3) discussion of communication channels used, theme, audience, place, and seminar promotion, (4) rationale for your selection of the items listed in number 3;
- E. communication tools including but not limited to:
 - 1. letterhead,
 - 2. invitation to keynote speaker,
 - a. Keynote must be a real person with expertise
 - b. Biography of speaker must be included
 - 3. pre-seminar information brochure,
 - 4. seminar announcement,
 - a. Good news letter to potential attendees
 - b. Registration form
 - 5. exhibitors,
 - a. Persuasive letter (inviting to attend and exhibit)
 - b. Bad news letter (declining exhibitor's request to exhibit)
 - 6. registration confirmation form,
 - a. Lodging and site information
 - b. Refund policy
 - 7. press release,
 - 8. progress report (memorandum format) to Board,

Groups decided to include any desired optional elements as long as they enhanced the presentation.

An assessment rubric (Figure 2) was given to students so that they were aware of what criteria the instructor expected to review in the completed presentation/collaborative writing project. In terms of the overall group oral presentation, the rubric explained what behaviors the instructors considered commendable, acceptable, and unacceptable. Groups were evaluated on the basis of certain criteria such as

1.	Each group member participated in the oral presentation,
2.	Presentation utilized appropriate media (design, clarity, etc.), and
3.	Each group member wore professional attire.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the instructor read and examined the group collaborative writing project to determine if it met all of the required criteria, and the group received a grade based on a combination of the oral presentation and the written report.

Figure 2: Assessment Rubric for Ultimate Time Robber Meeting Group Project				
CRITERIA	COMMENDABLE (5 pts.)	ACCEPTABLE (3 pts.)	UNACCEPTABLE (1 pt. Or 0 pts.)	TOTAL POINTS
Title Page	Contained all 4 parts correctly placed and balanced white space.	One part missing or incorrectly placed; white space unbalanced.	More than one part missing or incorrectly placed; white space unbalanced.	
Table of Contents	All parts included and properly formatted.	One part missing and/or improperly formatted.	Two or more parts missing and/or improperly formatted.	
Introduction	Told purpose; reviewed contents & organization; established tone.	One element missing; needed improvement.	More than one element missing; needed revision.	
Planning Grid	Clearly delineated sessions, day/time, one line blurb. Physical appearance fine.	Some improvement needed in:	Grid unacceptable.	
Organizational culture				
Organization Environment	Discussed organization mission, goals, objectives, and membership.	Presented only a few elements related to the organization environment.	Insufficient description of organization environment.	
Communication Channels	Clearly defined all communication channels used in planning the seminar.	Average discussion of communication channels.	Minimal discussion of communication channels.	
Discussion of theme, audience, and seminar promotion				

Figure 2: Assessment Rubric for Ultimate Time Robber Meeting Group Project				
CRITERIA	COMMENDABLE (5 pts.)	ACCEPTABLE (3 pts.)	UNACCEPTABLE (1 pt. Or 0 pts.)	TOTAL POINTS
Theme	Developed appropriate theme incorporating who, what, where, when, and why.	Addressed only a few of the 5 "w's".	Not appropriate.	
Audience	Selected audience appropriate for theme.		Selected audience was not appropriate choice for theme.	
Seminar promotion	Selected appropriate media/channels to promote the seminar.	Selected media/channels need more explanation. Others could have been more appropriate.	Selected media/channels did not fit.	
Rationale	Fully explained rationale for selecting theme, audience, place, and promotion.	Average explanation of selection rationale.	Minimal explanation of selection rationale.	
Seminar communication				
Organization Letterhead	Contained all required elements; followed design principles.	All but one required element included; followed most design principles.	More than one element missing; did not follow design principles.	
Invitation letter to keynote speaker	Followed direct request format. All parts present, including speaker biography. High quality.	Some parts present. Needed to develop more of an appeal. Average quality.	One part present others missing. Low quality.	
Pre-seminar informational brochure	Incorporated theme, benefits, and pertinent details. High quality.		Insufficient details. Low quality.	
Seminar announcement letter (good news)	Followed direct organization plan, correct format & punctuation; included all letter parts.	One item incorrect or missing.	Two or more items incorrect or missing.	

Figure 2: Assessment Rubric for Ultimate Time Robber Meeting Group Project				
CRITERIA	COMMENDABLE (5 pts.)	ACCEPTABLE (3 pts.)	UNACCEPTABLE (1 pt. Or 0 pts.)	TOTAL POINTS
Exhibitor invitation letter (persuasive)	Followed AIDA organization plan, correct format & punctuation; included all parts		Did not follow AIDA plan.	
Exhibitor rejection letter (bad news)	Followed indirect plan: buffer, reason, bad news, and positive close. Correct format & punctuation; included all letter parts.		Did not follow indirect plan.	
Registration confirmation				
Confirmation form	Included registration amount, method of payment, and refund policy.		One element missing.	
Sit/Lodging information	Discussed selected seminar location including available lodging, weather, entertainment, restaurants, sightseeing and transportation		More than one element missing.	
Press release	High quality. Followed guides for good-news message & displayed proper format.	Average quality. Missing details or positive close.	Low quality. Missed the purpose of a press release.	
Progress report to board (memorandum)	Quality content. Correct format.		Poor quality. Incorrect format.	
Other elements (MUST select at least one of the following)				
Video commercial	Included story board & script; high quality.	Included story board & script; average quality.		

Figure 2: Assessment Rubric for Ultimate Time Robber Meeting Group Project				
CRITERIA	COMMENDABLE (5 pts.)	ACCEPTABLE (3 pts.)	UNACCEPTABLE (1 pt. Or 0 pts.)	TOTAL POINTS
Radio commercial	Included script; high quality.	Included script; average quality.		
Promotional items	High quality.	Average quality.		
Participant's packet	High quality. Has name badge & program booklet.	Average quality.		

Each student completed a student reaction. The instrument gave students an opportunity to express their likes and dislikes of the project and to give any constructive suggestions for improvement. The following section discusses the findings compiled from student reactions.

REACTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Using the Delphi technique, the 200 student reaction sheets were examined to identify the most frequently occurring comments. The five categories eliciting comments were (1) What did you like best about this project? (2) What didn't you like about this project? (3) Describe your experience with working in this group. (4) How did this experience differ from working in other groups? (5) What did you observe about your group's process?

Beginning with what did you like best about this project, students responded as follows:

- ◆ The written letters.
- ◆ I thought the project strengths were the information received about the speakers. The video added some humor to the presentation.
- ◆ The project strengths were that it helped students prepare to work with others.
- ◆ It helped us learn how to organize a meeting in a business setting and gained experience in-group work.
- ◆ Time management, neatness, teamwork, and good flow of ideas.
- ◆ It helped me prepare well and work well with a team.
- ◆ Our projects strengths were everyone working together to get the job done.
- ◆ Valuable learning experience, taught how to work in teams effectively and efficiently, learned various forms of business communication.
- ◆ How at the end, the group, came together and actually worked.

- ◆ It's a good way for people to get to know each other.
- ◆ Good to try and do all this ourselves.
- ◆ Everyone in the group had good ideas and fun along with it.
- ◆ I think we had a lot of good ideas to talk about. Everyone helped out as much as possible. One other plus was that we worked well together.
- ◆ How well we worked together. Never had to do anything like this before.
- ◆ I really don't think that there is one thing that sticks out. I believe it is all strong.
- ◆ I think the strengths were how well we worked together. Everyone did a good job on the written part they contributed.
- ◆ It improved my group work skills.
- ◆ We worked well together, listened to each others idea's and informed each other.
- ◆ I really feel that we came up with a good topic that is important to today's society.
- ◆ It let us be creative, challenged us to manage our time and schedules.
- ◆ Web page, graphics, text
- ◆ We have a lot of good ideas, our technology ability was good.
- ◆ We had good graphic quality and worked well as a team even when things didn't go smoothly.
- ◆ Presentation → organized before had all info together.
- ◆ The understanding between the group and the way that everyone try to do more.
- ◆ Organized when putting the presentation together. Group agreed on just about everything

Moving to what didn't you like about this project, students responses were as follows:

- ◆ The size of the group. We might have tried to meet a couple more times but it was very hard trying to get everyone together.
- ◆ Having examples easily available to look at.
- ◆ Some of the things could be wordier.
- ◆ More guidelines-we were somewhat confused about the presentation not so close to our individual presentations.
- ◆ Require labor division guidelines and deadline for labor division definition.
- ◆ NO suggestions.
- ◆ We could have started to work earlier on it and maybe broke it up a little more because we all worked on most of the things together.
- ◆ It was hard to accommodate three other individual's schedules.
- ◆ More time spent at an earlier date.
- ◆ We should have done earlier, our schedules definitely conflicted.
- ◆ May need a little more explanation of what exactly is required.

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- ◆ More communication between members- we had no idea, one group member dropped the class-had to pick up his work!
 - ◆ To make sure if one is going to drop the class should not involve in the group project.
 - ◆ More people in our group.
 - ◆ More time committed.
 - ◆ Please show a video clip of a group presenting so we understand what we're suppose to be doing.
 - ◆ Show a video of what is expected of the presentation.
 - ◆ I think more explanation of the presentation part would be helpful.
 - ◆ Initial meeting should have been better, with a complete review of the instructor's instructions to separate each member's duties better. All members would have had no communication problems then of what was expected of them.
 - ◆ It might help to give students a little more of a choice of what to include in their projects. Certain areas may require a certain part while others may not require it. Also, be a little more specific in what you want in the oral reports.
 - ◆ More time, not so many things crammed into such a short period of time.
 - ◆ Maybe if some issues were discussed in class related to the project, it would have helped one understand the project more.
 - ◆ Have work divided up more evenly between four instead of three. It really hurt us that we ended up with three people. It would have been okay if we started off with three.

Next, when the students were asked, describe your experience with working in this group; the responses were as follows:

- ◆ I was amazed at how well we worked together. It seemed like everything fell into place. I really enjoyed it.
- ◆ I had fun, nice people to work with; we took each step at a time everyone did their part. Overall very good experience. Had respect for them, very helpful, good flow of ideas.
- ◆ Good experience. I enjoyed working with the group; we worked well with each other.
- ◆ I liked my group because we clicked will, and had good ideas. Not a typical group I had experience with.

- ◆ I liked working with Amanda and Frank. They both were hard workers and wanted to achieve success. I felt that Sean should have participated and contributed his input to the group.
- ◆ Frustrating; I felt like I did most of the work till the end when the guys felt the pressure of getting it done.
- ◆ I had a good experience, everyone worked well together.
- ◆ Very difficult to find time where all could attend.
- ◆ I enjoyed working with my group; everyone contributed to it to make it a success.
- ◆ I thought we all worked well with each other. I was the only girl in the group so it was weird. I kind of took the leadership role. I guess. Everyone was very nice, and we got along with each other.
- ◆ Thought it was a great experience.
- ◆ My experience was good. Everyone contributed no one really slacked off, or was a pain.
- ◆ Sometimes getting people to work along was like pulling teeth, but everyone worked hard and had a great sense of humor.
- ◆ It was difficult to find a common time to meet, when we met we all worked hard and listened to other ideas.
- ◆ It was very hard due to the fact that everyone is so busy with classes and work etc.. Otherwise it was easy to work with everyone when we got together.
- ◆ I enjoyed it because most of the time you usually have one person that doesn't want to do anything but that wasn't the case at all.

Next, when students were asked, how did this experience differ from working in other groups; the responses were as follows:

- ◆ The other groups I have worked with were much better. The experience differed because we work very well together and everyone was respectful.
- ◆ With most other groups, I usually see debate and disagreements. This group was smooth.
- ◆ The effectiveness of getting work done-best ever had. How smoothly things went never happened, good interaction.
- ◆ This group actually did an equal amount of work.
- ◆ When I work in other groups, everyone had something to do, work was left on one person. This did not happen in the group. Like I said before we work well together.

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- ◆ It was much more in depth. The group divided work among itself fairly equally usually, one or two people do all the work and the others just take credit for their efforts.
 - ◆ Waited till last minute to do everything, in other groups we had most stuff done earlier.
 - ◆ We worked well together and everyone was willing to share in the work. My other groups in other classes there's always one person who doesn't do anything.
 - ◆ Much higher work load.
 - ◆ This group worked together as one.
 - ◆ The only thing that was different was that I was the only girl in the group. And usually there is at least one other in the group.
 - ◆ We worked better together than most groups I've been in.
 - ◆ The fact that there was no rude screw off was different. Everyone did just about equal work.
 - ◆ It was pretty much the same. Two independent people and two that needed a small push. Everyone contributed; not just half or most of us.
 - ◆ The workload was a little more in this project.
 - ◆ It didn't.

Finally, when the students were asked, what did you observe about your group's process; the responses were as follows:

- ◆ Slow at first then good.
- ◆ We procrastinated, but we should have looked at everything more carefully to see just how much work was involved.
- ◆ Moved slowly until near the end and then picked up.
- ◆ We got a lot accomplished in each meeting.
- ◆ Our process I think was good, we each kind of took a role and helped each other out. I think I was considered the leader. I kind of set things up for the meetings and everything. Everybody else found themselves doing other jobs and preparing for the presentation. We all worked hard to get the job done and for it to look good.
- ◆ Everyone listened to each other's ideas very well and got the work done.
- ◆ Very effective. As soon as we got one thing done we moved on to the next.
- ◆ We worked really hard when we needed to. We started to slow and only doing things together but realized we needed to do stuff along in order to finish.
- ◆ We had a difficult time deciding who will do what.
- ◆ We were very organized and understood one another.
- ◆ We started out slow but as things started coming together, we pulled everything off.

- ◆ Once we got started we worked very efficiently.

An analysis of the student responses on the Student Reaction Sheet disclosed that the students perceived the project to be a worthwhile learning experience. Actual statements taken from the completed Student Reaction sheets revealed a variety of thoughts, difficulties, and serendipitous findings on the part of student participants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study are beneficial to faculty teaching a business communications course at the secondary or post secondary level. A project that incorporates team building skills, group process concepts, and collaborative learning techniques should be incorporated into the curriculum. When the project is replicated, some recommendations to incorporate include the following:

1.	Teach team building strategies throughout the semester so students will have a successful experience.
2.	Practice conflict resolution techniques to lessen tension within the group.
3.	Build each team with a maximum of four members and, if possible, with a variety of majors to maximize learning opportunities.
4.	Assign the project in the first week(s) of the semester so students have ample opportunity to complete the task.

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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH-ONLY POLICIES IN U.S. WORK ENVIRONMENTS

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ABSTRACT

English-only policies in U.S. companies have been questioned in recent years. Some employers feel that English-only policies increase efficiency, promote effective communication, and improve employee relations. Employees whose first language is English, however, resent being subjected to languages other than English when working in their own country.

To determine students' perspectives on and knowledge of English-only policies in U.S. companies, a survey instrument containing eight statements related to English-only policies was developed and administered to 384 students enrolled at a Mid-South university. Means and standard deviations were calculated; the guideline with the highest mean response was related to employees' belief that it is acceptable for employees to speak a language other than English during office break times. In addition, over 70 percent of students were unaware that U.S. courts have not mandated that English is the official language of the United States.

INTRODUCTION

English is the most spoken language in the world. In 2000, 322 million people were native English speakers. English is the language of international business, and most businesspersons see this trend toward a common global language as positive (Fox, 2000).

In some U.S. companies, however, mandating that English is the only language to be spoken in the workplace has been questioned especially in light of the fact that the United States has no federal policy declaring that English is the official language of the country (Stevens, 1999). Since the 1980s, many U.S. states have considered passing English-only legislation (Mora & Davila, 2002). To date, 27 states have made English their official state language (U.S. English, 2002). California's AB 800 legislation, enacted in 2001, made it unlawful to adopt a policy that prohibits or limits using a language other than English in the workplace unless employers can prove that such a policy is a business necessity and that employees are notified of the exact policy guidelines, including when the policy must be observed and the consequences for policy violation (Shaw & Miller, 2002).

CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO IMPLEMENTING ENGLISH-ONLY POLICIES

Decisions related to implementing an English-only policy must take into consideration the legal aspects of such a decision as well as employer and employee concerns.

Legal Aspects of English-only Policies

Title VII, Section 703, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 clearly specifies that employers cannot discriminate against a person on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, or national origin. What has not been clear in recent years is whether the Civil Rights Act is violated by states adopting English-only policies that may have a negative impact on ethnic and racial minorities (Flynn, 1995; Savage, 2001). Flynn (1995) and Walden (2002) maintain that the Civil Rights Act does not expressly include language and that no federal statute exists that prohibits companies from establishing English-only policies.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 1980 published guidelines on English-only rules in the workplace. The first guideline applied to the requirement that employees speak no language other than English while at work. According to the EEOC, this rule is in violation of the Civil Rights Act because the result of implementing such a policy might be the creation of an atmosphere in which some employees, because of their national origin, would feel isolated, inferior, or intimidated. Thus, these employees could perceive that they are in a discriminatory work environment. The second EEOC guideline applied to the requirement that English be spoken only at specific times. According to the EEOC, this rule was also considered invalid unless a company could justify its use based on business necessity. Companies mandating that English be spoken at certain times must communicate this policy to their employees and specify consequences when employees do not comply. The EEOC further stated that companies that feel justified in implementing an English-only policy should allow their employees to speak languages other than English in areas on the company premises where they usually go during their personal time (lunch and break times) (Walden, 2002).

These EEOC guidelines have been rejected by at least two U.S. courts. In cases in the early and mid-1990s, courts ruled that employees were not negatively affected by English-only policies in the workplace and that an English-only rule is not automatically demeaning, intimidating, or coercive (Petersen, 1994). Two later decisions, however, upheld the guidelines so the EEOC keeps enforcing their original 1980 guidelines (Walden, 2002). Walden (2002) advises that "until the U.S. Congress, the EEOC, or the U.S. Supreme Court give more guidance for businesses to maintain reasonable English-language workplace rules," (p. 614) companies should strengthen their policies by communicating English-only rules to all employees and consequences for not following these rules and also by permitting employees to speak whatever language they wish during their free time.

A more recent ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court on June 20, 1994, "declared that employers can enforce English-only rules in the workplace" (Dresser, 1996, p. 163). Many companies were pleased with the decision because they felt it would have a beneficial effect on working conditions.

Employers' Concerns with English-only Policies

Employers who feel the need to implement an English-only policy may argue that speaking one language during work hours increases efficiency, promotes effective communication, and improves employee relations. In at least one company, employers instituted an English-only policy because some workers used Spanish to harass their non-Spanish speaking coworkers. When employees are being harassed in a language other than English, a manager who speaks only English may not be aware of such harassment (Flynn, 1995; Petersen, 1994). In today's increasingly multicultural workplace, employers are faced with problems arising from employees who have limited proficiency in English. Employers who implement English-only policies feel that benefits include improving employees' proficiency in English in addition to improving supervisory effectiveness, promoting safety on the job, and reducing ethnic tension (Petersen, 1994).

The EEOC does not agree that an English-only policy reduces ethnic tension; their position is such that such rules may actually increase ethnic tension and result in divisiveness in the workplace (Roffer, 2000). The responsibility for justifying an English-only policy clearly rests with the employer (Shaw & Miller, 2002). Employers who determine that a single language is necessary for conducting business would need to be able to justify this rule by proving that using various languages at work would have an adverse effect on workplace safety or productivity (Pakiela, 2002).

Two employers were ordered to pay damages after firing or disciplining Hispanic workers who spoke Spanish in the workplace. In both cases, the companies had instituted English-only policies, including during lunch periods and breaks. In the decision, the employers were told that their policy constituted disparate treatment. Thus, English-only policies have been successfully challenged as being unlawful (Hatch & Hall, 2000).

The need for English-only policies varies according to the type of industry. Employers in the food service industry, for example, have indicated that they are more flexible about requiring that employees speak English only during work hours. They point out that fluency in the English language is a necessity for employees who deal with customers but that such fluency is not as necessary for kitchen workers (Schuster, 2000). A representative of Marriott Management Services agreed that speaking English is important when interacting with customers but less important when working behind the scenes (Blake, 1997). In the healthcare industry, speaking a language other than English is viewed as a legitimate concern in hospital settings where communicating with coworkers, such as in operating rooms, or with patients is of utmost importance (Fink, Robinson, & Wyld, 1996). Banks, retail establishments, and other industries where employees have direct contact with the public can justify an English-only policy based on business necessity. Likewise, safety-sensitive

industries such as refineries and industries involving the use of dangerous equipment may legally require that employees converse in English only (Sklarewitz, 1992).

Employees' Concerns with English-only Policies

Employees' concerns may be looked at from the perspective of those whose native language is not English and employees whose first language is English. Employees who speak English as a second language may feel that English-only policies are really discriminatory in that they are aimed specifically at immigrant populations. These employees may feel that changing from one language to another during conversations "can facilitate interpersonal relationships and is a natural and spontaneous way of communicating" (Speicher, 2002, p. 621). Further, in a country that embraces workplace diversity, permitting employees to speak a language other than English, especially during personal conversations that are unrelated to job performance, would seem appropriate.

Employees whose first language is English often resent being subjected to languages other than English when working in a company in their home country. Common sense and good manners would support such an attitude. Well-mannered persons understand that speaking a language other than the language of the host country when within hearing distance of persons who are natives of the country is quite rude. Speaking in support of English-only policies, one supervisor stated: "How can we function as a team if we don't even speak the same language?" (Speicher, 2002, p. 621). In addition, U.S. employees whose native language is English often feel that coworkers who speak in a language other than English during work hours are being rude and exclusionary (Murphy, Barlow, & Hatch, 1993; Teboul, 2002). According to Dresser (1996), some companies have imposed the English-only rule because of a concern that employees who are speaking another language may actually be making negative comments about their coworkers or supervisors. The assumption is that if the comments were complimentary, they would be made in English.

Harassment issues may also be involved. Female employees have felt uncomfortable when male employees have made comments in a language other than English, especially when the comments were accompanied by laughter and looking in the direction of the female employees. Female employees may feel that they are the target of sexually suggestive comments and may even file sexual harassment complaints based on what they perceive to be vulgar and inappropriate behavior (Teboul, 2002).

SURVEY PURPOSE AND PROCEDURES

To determine students' perspectives on English-only policies in U.S. companies, a survey instrument containing eight statements related to English-only policies was developed and administered to 384 students at a Mid-South university. Using a student population was considered appropriate since today's university students are tomorrow's employees who will be affected by

English-only policies in their work environments. A five-point scale was provided with five representing agree and one representing disagree. Students were also asked to provide their gender, age, classification, and status (business or nonbusiness major). Means and standard deviations were calculated using SPSS, Version 10.

DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, 201 females made up 52.3 percent of respondents while 183 males made up 47.7 percent of respondents. The majority (331 or 86.2 percent) of respondents were between the ages of 20 and 39. Students classified as junior/senior made up the largest group of participants (307 or 78.8 percent). Most respondents were business majors (290 or 76.1 percent). English was the first language of 95.3 percent (366) of respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent
Female	201	52.3
Male	183	47.7
Age		
Under 20	36	9.4
20-39	331	86.2
40 or above	16	4.2
Classification		
Freshman/Sophomore	48	12.6
Junior/Senior	307	78.8
Graduate Student	26	6.8
Unclassified	7	1.8
Status		
Business major	290	76.1
Nonbusiness major	91	23.9
First language		
English	366	95.3
Other	18	4.7

Means and standard deviations of student responses are shown in Table 2. The guideline with the highest mean response (4.05) was related to speaking languages other than English during office break times (the statement was correct). The guideline with the second highest mean response (3.99) was related to English as the official language of the United States (the statement was incorrect). The guideline with the third highest mean response (3.97) was related to English-only policies when safety is a concern (the statement was correct).

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The U.S courts have mandated that English is the official language of the United States.	3.99	1.33
2. Requiring employees to use English only while on the company premises is legal.	2.93	1.49
3. An English-only policy is appropriate when work effectiveness or employee safety would be jeopardized.	3.97	1.19
4. Employees of U.S firms may speak a language other than English during office break times.	4.05	1.20
5. U.S employees who speak English only feel excluded when fellow employees speak in another language while at work.	3.52	1.29
6. When employees speak a language other than English in the presence of U.S. workers, U.S employees assume that they are being talked about in a derogatory or negative manner.	3.50	1.24
7. Most U.S workers agree with the saying, "When in Rome, do as the Romans," regarding the use of English only during work hours.	3.80	1.10
8. English-only policies cause discomfort and stress for bilinguals in the workplace which may affect their productivity.	3.18	1.27

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The workforce in many organizations is becoming multicultural and multilingual. Employers charged with managing these diverse workforces have been faced with deciding whether English-only policies are necessary for effective communication among employees and with customers. The legal aspects of implementing English-only rules must be examined in addition to the impact such policies would have on productivity, efficiency, and morale.

Proponents of the use of languages other than English during work hours point out that having a diverse workforce is a distinct competitive advantage in today's diverse marketplace (Pakiela, 2002). Many companies feel that having employees who can speak more than one language is a decided advantage. For example, having employees who can greet customers in their native language is viewed in a positive manner. In addition, the ability to speak other languages is often necessary in emergency situations and in hospitals (Dresser, 1996).

On the other hand, speaking languages other than English can cause hostility and dissension among certain groups of employees. Employees who speak English only often feel that they are being excluded from conversations in another language or may feel that bilingual employees are being critical of others or are saying negative things about the non-English speaking employees. In addition, safety and workplace harmony must be considered.

A total of 278 (72.4 percent) students enrolled at a Mid-South university were unaware that U.S. courts have not mandated that English is the official language of the United States. Results of the question related to the legality of requiring employees to use English only on the company premises reflected students' uncertainty: 99 or 25.8 percent strongly disagreed while 82 or 21.4 percent strongly agreed. Their responses were understandable in view of the fact that some courts have upheld English-only policies while others have not. However, the 1994 U.S. Supreme Court ruling did specify that employers are within their legal rights to enforce English-only rules in their companies.

With the increasingly multicultural and multilingual populations of both U.S. firms and colleges and universities, employers and teachers need to address these issues in their courses, especially courses in business communication and in international business communication.

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THE ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS OF REDUCING CYBERSLACKING IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

Cyberslacking describes the activities involved in wasting time on the internet while people are supposedly at work. Activities include visiting pornographic sites and news sites, shopping, stock trading, vacation planning, gambling, and job searching. Currently, 122 million people have Internet access at work, and the number is rising. As unrestricted internet use increases, managers are faced with a double-edged sword. On the one hand, employees can use the internet to facilitate job-related duties, but those same employees can, on the other hand, easily become distracted by the many available and tempting web pages. This paper will define cyberslacking, discuss Internet abuse, define Internet addiction, describe the reasons for concern, delineate the costs to organizations, and describe what managers can do to limit cyberslacking in their organizations.

INTRODUCTION

"Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work." Aristotle

You walk by employees' desks and see them furiously typing away, apparently hard at work. In reality, they may be trading stocks or e-mailing jokes to friends (Fertell, 2002). A new generation of cyberslacking workers are multishirking by spending hours a day frittering away time online. As e-mail and high-speed Internet access have become standard-issue office equipment, rampant abuse of computers in the workplace is making the water cooler look like a font of productivity. For bosses, cyberslacking is becoming a pervasive and perplexing problem in the new wired workplace. With the Internet morphing into the virtual Mall of America, day trading, vacation planning, and hard-core porn are all just a click away. From game sites like mplayer.com where usage surges during the lunch hour, to online retailers like Amazon.com, which experience their heaviest traffic during the workday, the message is plain: people who surf prefer to do it at work (Naughton, 1999).

Other realistic examples of how employees are using the company's computer might include Alice and Sally in accounting posting defamatory messages about another employee on the company's electronic bulletin. Meanwhile, Bill, the food and beverage manager, is logged on to an online chat room and is trying to get a date with a woman he met there. The boss might even purchase online stocks, books, and gifts for friends and family. On the surface these activities may

seem harmless, but, at a minimum, they cause losses in productivity and slow down a company's computer system. At worst, they can result in legal action (Mills, et.al., 2001). This paper will define cyberslacking, discuss Internet abuse, define Internet Addiction, describe the reasons for concern, delineate the costs to organizations, and describe what managers can do to limit cyberslacking in their organizations.

DEFINITION

"I do not fear computers. I fear the lack of them." Isaac Asimov

Cyberslacking involves visiting pornographic sites and news sites, shopping, stock trading, vacation planning, gaming, chatting or engaging in any general non-business Internet activity on company time using company resources. In addition, this practice includes looking for a new job on the internet, comparing present salaries and working conditions with that available elsewhere purely as a matter of curiosity, doing homework on company time, and exchanging e-mail with friends and family (Block, 2001). "Cyberslacking," "cyberloafing," and "cyberbludging" are terms used to describe the activities involved in wasting time on the internet while people are supposedly at work (Mills, et.al., 2001). Over the past three years, several organizations such as The New York Times, Rolls Royce and Xerox have fired workers for abusing computer resources. If employees are using the Internet for non-work related purposes, then this results in reduced productivity and ultimate loss in profits. On average, workers browse the Internet more at the office than at home because of the presence of proxy settings on their PCs, which allow for full-time connectivity.

INTERNET ABUSE

"In all large corporations, there is a pervasive fear that someone, somewhere is having fun with a computer on company time." John C. Dvorak

Currently, 122 million people have Internet access at work. That number is predicted to rise to 272 million by 2004, making cyberslacking a potentially enormous strain on corporate resources (Deane, 2000). According to a new survey from Vault.com, 90% of the nation's workers admit to surfing recreational sites during office hours. And 84% of workers say they send personal e-mail from work. SurfWatch Software estimates that nearly one third of American workers' time on the Internet is spent cheating the boss out of real work, double last year's rate of on-the-job recreational surfing (Naughton, 1999). Another study done by The Society of Financial Service Professionals on technology and ethics in the workplace revealed that 65% had committed at least one act of Internet abuse in the form of shopping; using company e-mail for personal reasons (39%); playing computer games (34%); job searching (17%); and copying software for personal use (9%)

(Greenspan, 2002). Few would argue that the Internet is an astonishing creation. Like the telephone, radio and television that came before it, the Internet has changed our lives. Yet with every advancement, there is always abuse. With computer terminals on every desk, employee abuse of the Internet is rampant and it appears that the worst offenders are college educated males under the age of 35 (Greenspan, 2002).

As unrestricted internet use increases, managers are faced with a double-edged sword. On the one hand, employees can use the internet to facilitate job-related duties, but those same employees can, on the other hand, easily become distracted by the many available, interesting, and tempting web pages. In fact, by one count, the average employee spends up to 2.5 hours a day cyberslacking (Mills, et. al., 2001).

INTERNET ADDICTION

"There is no pleasure in having nothing to do; the fun is in having lots to do and not doing it." Mary Wilson Little

For years, addiction such as alcohol, drugs, and gambling were the addictions that concerned employers because they affected employees' work. These days, there is a new addiction that is running rampant and employees may be feeding their habits at their desks every day. It is called Internet Addiction and it is taking its toll on companies across the country (Foster, 2001). Internet addiction, also known as pathological Internet use, is a psychiatric condition. The symptomatic behaviors include interpersonal problems, neglecting friends, family, and job, irritability when attempting to stop using the Internet, staying online more than originally intended, and lying or concealing how much time is spent on line (Davis, 2001).

While the Internet is not a physical addiction, it is a mental one. Some people are addicted to Internet chat rooms or instant messaging with family and friends. They spend precious work hours chatting on the computer during the day even though their in-boxes may be piling up and they haven't even started that important project which is due in a few hours. They opt to chat with their friends because it mentally feels better to spend time with people who love and nurture them than people who assign them things they don't want to do and who may even criticize the work that they do perform. People naturally avoid those things that make them feel uncomfortable or stressed and gravitate towards those activities that feel like fun. The same holds true for other online addictive behaviors such as shopping, gambling, and researching vacation spots or buying or trading stocks. For many people, the Internet is an escape from reality in order to ease the pressures of everyday life (Foster, 2001).

Recent research has revealed that cyberslackers' favorite sites include news, investment, pornography, travel, entertainment and shopping. Fifty percent of employees report receiving racist, sexist, pornographic, or otherwise inappropriate email at work. Furthermore, 90% of workers admit

to recreational surfing on company time, accounting for nearly one third of their online activity (Kay, 2001). The top non-work Web activity favored by IRS employees was going to financial sites. Chat and email ran a close second, followed by miscellaneous activities (which included visiting adult sites), search requests, and looking at or downloading streaming media. eBay ranks 7th among the most visited sites for at-work surfers and ranks first in terms of average pages per person and time spent per month, at almost 300 pages and two hours per person (Davis, 2001).

Despite the enormous payoff from e-business and online access to information, the Internet has quietly emerged as a playground for workers, who increasingly download music, play games, buy books, and send e-cards, all during working hours. Others tap out jokes or send chain letters across the company and beyond, devouring bandwidth (Greengard, 2000).

Other people argue that workers who use the Internet are less likely to leave the office to run errands, to talk less on the phone, and to read fewer books, magazines, and newspapers during the work day. They also argue that the Internet allows them to gain balance in their lives. For example, when people are allowed to do personal business on the Internet during their lunch hours, worker productivity actually rises (Surmacz, 2002).

REASONS FOR CONCERN

"That's the secret to life. . . replace one worry with another. . ." Charles Schultz

There are three main reasons why companies should be concerned about their employees' surf habits: (1) loss of productivity, (2) legal liability, and (3) waste of bandwidth. When employees use workplace PCs for personal reasons, the immediate effect is a loss of productivity. Time is an asset and a misuse of that asset is just as wrong as the misuse of any other asset. Internet addiction makes meeting crucial deadlines an impossible task, and precious time is wasted on the Internet checking horoscopes and the news.

In addition, many people are not only wasting their time but are potentially creating legal liability for the company. Many large firms have suffered public embarrassment, legal bills, compensation claims, and clean up costs when employees seek out inappropriate material online, send e-mail to people they shouldn't, accidentally circulate confidential information outside a business or spread a computer virus (Internet misuse, 2002). In fact, some organizations have found that, left unchecked, the issue can explode in their faces. Two industry giants, Chevron and Microsoft, found themselves settling sexual-harassment lawsuits for \$2.2 million apiece as a result of internally circulated e-mails that, according to the law, might have created hostile work environments (Greengard, 2000). One company faced six claims of sexual harassment because an employee downloaded an "adult bulletin board" to the company's computer system and programmed it to display the offensive material on employees' screens when they accessed their mail (Eyres,

2002). Employees can also sue their employers if a co-worker has downloaded pornographic or racist materials.

Finally, most businesses today invest in costly high-speed Internet connections. While Internet Service Providers (ISP) can offer corporate clients greater bandwidth, the Providers simply cannot keep up with the increase in Web sites offering streaming video and live Webcasts. For example, when lingerie retailer Victoria's Secret held its second annual online fashion show in May, over two million people tuned in - most from their office PCs. The video Webcast gobbled up so much bandwidth that it tied up corporate networks, taking up space needed for actual work activities. Just one employee streaming the Victoria's Secret Webcast was the equivalent of downloading the entire Encyclopedia Britannica onto his or her workplace network. Cyberslacking clogs up network access, making it difficult for diligent employees to do their jobs (New software, 2000). Lastly, one employee brought down an entire corporate network by sending an animated greeting card to 100 colleagues. He found that it didn't seem to be reaching all recipients and tried to resend it to everyone four more times (Marron, 2000). As broadband applications over the Internet continue to become increasingly popular, corporate networks are becoming bottlenecked; streaming media, mp3 files, video and audio files, and large graphic files are increasing network crashes, which costs companies money (Cyberslackers, 2002).

COST

"A wise man should have money in his head, but not in his heart." Jonathan Swift

Corporate America spends approximately \$3.5 billion annually for internet access, with at least \$1 billion being attributed to employees' personal and cyberslacking activities. The potential negative effects from lost productivity alone represent a multi-billion-dollar issue. At the peak of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, www.ZDNet.com reported an estimated loss of \$470 million in productivity from American employees who were reading the documents online. During December, online shopping and holiday entertainment sites caused productivity losses of approximately \$310 million (Mills, et. al., 2001). In addition, Americans spend an average of 21 hours a month conducting personal Web surfing while at work. That is more than an hour a day, every day. One thousand Internet abusers conducting personal Web surfing for one hour per day can cost a company more than \$35 million a year. Taking this a step further, cyberslacking impacts today's Fortune 1000 in the multibillion-dollar range. (Cyberslacking - Internet Abuse, 2002). Employee misuse of corporate networks is not a probability; it is a reality. Last year, the estimated loss to U.S. companies due to recreational Web surfing totaled \$5.3 billion (The End of Cyberslacking, 2001).

WHAT MANAGERS CAN DO

"The man who has confidence in himself gains the confidence of others." Hasidic Saying

There are a number of steps managers can take to reduce cyberslacking in their organizations.

1.	<i>Enact an E-mail Usage Policy</i> - Clearly define what rights the company reserves and explain that e-mail communications are not private (Eyres, 2002).
2.	<i>Reward productivity.</i>
3.	<i>Train employees on effective Internet uses.</i>
4.	<i>Hire highly motivated and self-starting employees</i> (Foster, 2001).
5.	<i>Install Internet filtering software like Websense</i> , which helps businesses monitor, report and manage how their employees are using the Internet. Websense blocks employee access to Web sites, designating them as "off limits," and records Web use so managers can see where their staffers are surfing (New software, 2000).
6.	<i>Establish an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)</i> and delineate what is acceptable for employees to do online (Fertell, 2002).
7.	<i>Offer ongoing and continual communication.</i> Provide regular electronic "pop up" reminders that appear on each employee's computer, and require each individual to read and agree to the terms.
8.	<i>Educate employees about Internet addiction and the warning signs.</i> This will help them realize how their behavior is sabotaging their own success and career growth, as well as the company's profitability (Foster, 2001).

CONCLUSION

"Anyone can do any amount of work provided it isn't the work he is supposed to be doing at the moment." Robert Benchley

Lower productivity, legal liability, and network crashes cost American corporations \$5.3 billion a year. With the internet becoming the Mall of America, employees spend up to 2.5 hours a day cyberslacking. They play games, go to pornographic sites, shop, plan vacations, do their investments, read the news, and e-mail their friends and family, all on company time. This new addiction of choice is the internet. But there are many things managers can do to bring the workers back to the work: educate employees about internet addiction, establish a policy on internet and e-mail usage, install filtering software, and, most importantly, hire highly motivated and self-starting employees.

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CREATIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE: MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR POSITIVE COMMUNICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Communicating ideas and visions accurately within an organization is critical to the organization's success. Many methods to transmit the desired information are available to facilitate effective communication. Managers need to be aware of these methods and how they can improve their own communication skills as well as their employees' skills within the organization. This paper focuses on idea collection, methods, vision, and skills improvement of communication in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

An idea is a conception formed by effort. Businesses thrive on new ideas, and very often their success relies on new conceptions or plans developed by employees of the company. Therefore, managers must be aware of ways to encourage the production of ideas in the workplace. However, idea generation is not enough. Ideas must also be communicated to others in order to be beneficial to any business. This paper presents some methods and strategies that managers can use to aid in idea collection.

COMMUNICATION AND IDEA COLLECTION

Customers can provide feedback to businesses in the form of surveys and focus groups. These methods of idea gathering are good for improving existing products and services, but customers are not able to perceive the scope and depth of possibilities that the company may be seeking (Buggie, 2001). Many customers simply do not have the knowledge to suggest innovative ideas for corporate change and improvement. However, collecting ideas informally from individual employees can lead to big successes. Employers can encourage employees to put suggestions in the old fashioned suggestion box, assuming that they are looked at, discussed, and analyzed for possibilities (Messmer,

2001). Other methods include implementing an idea lottery, an idea notebook, or an idea quota and displaying an Idea Hall of Fame to recognize contributions made by employees (Michalko, 1997). In the idea lottery, the employer gives a ticket to each employee as ideas are shared and then holds a lottery at the end of a specified time, with a prize going to the winning ticket holder. Idea notebooks are presented to employees to keep a running record of their ideas, and at the end of the month the books are collected and all employee ideas are categorized and shared. Idea quotas entail requesting a specified number of ideas to be shared during a period of time (Michalko, 1997).

Managers can provide training (workshops, seminars) to employees in the form of creative training, communication training for collaboration, conflict resolution training (Reyes, 2000), and even improvisation and humor sessions (Bourrie, 1995). Employees may need to be trained to tap into their own creativity, and most people can use training or refreshers on how to effectively communicate with others. Conflict resolution is important for keeping peace when groups come together to accomplish a task, since not everyone will agree on all points. Surprisingly, companies are even bringing in comedians, actors, and improvisation artists to work with employees. Humor brings enjoyment to the workplace, and the person enjoying his job will feel less stressed and appear more approachable (Bourrie, 1995). Improvisation allows for team building and requires imagination. Most importantly, improvisation teaches "yielding," which means going with your colleague's idea rather than entertaining your own ideas (Bourrie, 1995).

Some companies are fostering creativity through the work environment and corporate culture. Workspaces that support the movement of people and spontaneous idea sharing are becoming more common. Cubicles with low walls or no walls at all encourage communication (Reyes, 2000). Mobile tables, carts, and easels facilitate spontaneous and planned idea sessions (Scott, 1996). Another workspace trend today is replacing the traditional meeting room with a creative retreat that promotes a relaxed atmosphere for communication and idea flow. Lucent Technologies has created such a room called Ideaverse where employees can work together, use creative materials, or attend creative workshops (Reyes, 2000).

Managers can have a tremendous impact on idea collection through the corporate culture they promote. If managers are encouraging the sharing of ideas, they also need to be willing to look at any and all ideas, building on them without rushing to judgment (Penson, 1995). Managers must train their employees as well as themselves to avoid firehosing ideas in order to produce an atmosphere that allows risk taking (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Instead of saying "Yes, but..." say "Yes, and..." or think of ways the idea can work rather than why it would not work (Michalko, 1997). Also, empowering employees to make decisions and ask questions can help generate ideas for improving and innovating some aspect of the company. Managers can hold regular idea sessions, encourage weekly small group lunch creative sessions, and institute cross-departmental idea sessions (Michalko, 1997). When good ideas are implemented it is important for managers to recognize the contributors. An environment in which employees feel their ideas make a difference inspires collaboration and encourages "outside the box" thinking (Messmer, 2001).

One of the most popular forms of idea collection is brainstorming. Brainstorming entails a group session where ideas are gathered quickly, inducing an uninhibited idea flow without elaboration or evaluation (Willax, 2001). The goal of brainstorming is to generate as many ideas as possible without prejudice (Messmer, 2001). Brainstorming can include employees from a single department, many departments, or even outside experts with the purpose of adding diversity of thought and experience to the team (Crawford, 2001). The results of the brainstorming session are then analyzed and expanded upon after a break, in a longer, more serious setting.

Finally, managers should encourage employees to keep their eyes and ears open, letting the world around them communicate ideas to them. By sending employees shopping for ideas, they are being exposed to opportunities for thinking "outside the box." Taking advantage of the surroundings and then adapting ideas to a company's advantage could provide the company's next big opportunity (Anonymous, 1999, April). Communication is key for idea collection. The communication of ideas in an organization can be prompted from customers, employees, or even outside experts. Managers have a great deal of control over encouraging ideas through the existing work environment and corporate culture. Most of all, managers need to train themselves and others to be aware of their surroundings and accepting of others' ideas, or opportunities may be missed.

METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

As a matter of principle, and in order to survive, managers must strive for higher quality in communicating company goals and vision to employees. The communication process is demonstrated in various ways outlined in the following research. Managers are concerned with the cost of communication and how it can be decreased by efficient personnel and proper equipment, materials, and procedures. One of the most widely used methods of communication in the workplace is the business meeting. Successful business meetings and conferences depend on planning, including an agenda, skillful conducting of the meeting, and cooperation by the participants. Meetings can help to improve or modify the attitudes of participants as they gain understanding and insights by hearing the viewpoints of others. Business meetings also can help develop a more willing acceptance of change.

A popular method of communication is written communication through technology. Managers communicate with different PC software applications in sharing information and ideas within the organization. Word processing is a computer application that facilitates writing, editing, formatting, and printing text. The ability to keyboard a document, store the document electronically, and edit the electronic version allows the easy addition, deletion, or movement of text.

Another well-known form of communication in the workplace is electronic mail (e-mail) in which information is sent from one computer screen to another. The term electronic mail typically refers to a message sent from computer to computer through local networks (used for internal mail), or wide area networks and the Internet. E-mail is used both internally and externally in an effort to

communicate information for the organizations. Electronic mail eliminates the frustration and expense of "telephone tag" within the workplace.

Today, the use of the fax machine is so economical that they are practical even for small businesses. Facsimile (fax) transmission provides an advantage not available through any other form of electronic communication--the transmission to other fax machines, anywhere in the world, of exact copies of written material, drawings, photographs, maps, charts, or other pictorial material (Klenn & Treece, 1998).

One of the latest innovations of technology in communication is the GroupWare software package. GroupWare software is typically installed on a computer network and allows many users to communicate in numerous ways. GroupWare supports collaborative efforts of work groups. GroupWare allows a user to review ideas of others at any time and to add ideas for others in the group. Such togetherness cuts down on miscommunication and accelerates workflow.

Voice mail is the use of oral communication through technology. Voice mail may also be referred to as voice store-and-forward, voice processing, phone mail, and voice messaging. Spoken messages are recorded for playing back at a later time. Voice messages are like letters in that they evoke no immediate response. Very similar to e-mail, voice messages are placed in "mailboxes." The same message can be "broadcast" to numerous mailboxes simultaneously. Recipients control when the messages are taken, picking them up at their convenience.

Finally, the dynamic use of teleconferencing and videoconferencing continues to evolve in the workplace. Teleconferencing is electronic communication between two or more people at two or more locations. With speakerphones in each office, the number of participants can be greatly increased. Videoconferencing occurs over telecommunications links and includes televised pictures of the participants, either as still shots or in full action, like regular television. Videoconferencing can be either one-way or two-way, with several variations of each. Many managers and leaders spend a large portion of their time in meetings. Because of increasing travel costs, some organizations hold meetings by videoconferencing, either nationwide or in a limited geographical area.

Today's electronic office provides business communicators with additional channels for sending and receiving messages and gathering data. Professional communicators have increased responsibilities to communicate clearly and effectively. Employees in today's workforce have access to word processing software and its accompanying tools, such as spell checkers, thesauruses, grammar checkers, e-mail, facsimile transmission, and scanners. When effectively used, these tools can speed the creation, revision, and/or delivery of documents.

Employees often have access to electronic databases and the Internet to assist in research tasks. When the communicator wishes to convey messages orally, voice mail, multimedia presentation software, teleconferencing, and videoconferencing all provide support for presenting and delivering messages. The widespread use of these various technology tools has opened the door for millions

of employees to become telecommuters. Telecommuters can work in "virtual" offices, whether those offices are in their homes, in hotels, on airplanes, or in automobiles.

Regardless of changing methods and media, the principles of effective communication still apply. Speaking, writing, listening, reading, and thinking skills will increase in importance with changing technology. Common sense and etiquette should be important considerations when using technology for communication in the workplace.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATING VISION

Managers often spend the majority of their time focusing on developing a vision statement for their organization without realizing the significance of effectively communicating the vision. It is not enough to write the vision statement and post it in the organization. Life must be breathed into the vision through clear and creative communication channels. This portion of the paper will focus on different ways managers should communicate the organizational vision to employees so that it is viewed as a shared vision. Effective methods for communicating the leadership vision include repetition, simplistic instruction, living the vision, powerful language, positive communication, and conviction. It is important for the vision to be repeated as frequently as possible. The vision should be incorporated into every aspect of the organization and worked into as many conversations as possible. It should be integrated into as many communication channels as possible--personal presentations, written communications, e-mails, company newsletters, meetings, advertising, marketing campaigns, and plaques and engravings which state the vision placed in organization hallways, offices, and lobbies (Dolak, 2002).

Many people learn through repetition. For example, sometimes when a person reads a particular passage from a book, the first time it is not clear. Therefore, it becomes necessary to reread the passage for a clearer or deeper understanding. The more often a person is exposed to something, the more likely he is to remember it. Communicating the corporate vision is no different. It has to be seen, viewed, and heard multiple times in order to be remembered. "The more times and ways people hear the vision statement, the more comfortable they will become with it. Repetition breeds awareness, acceptance, and understanding" (Parker, 2001).

Because people have different learning styles, using several sources to communicate the vision is an excellent way to teach the vision across various learning styles (for example, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic). Organizations normally communicate through group meetings, newsletters, magazines, Intranets, posters, and informal hallway conversations. Face to face presentations are the most persuasive for bringing about change in attitude, multimedia presentations are good at evoking memories, and written communications are best at reinforcing and deepening understanding (Parker, 2001). However, because we all learn differently, it is necessary to use a variety of communication vehicles.

Keeping the vision simple is another essential element of effectively communicating the vision. Managers often make the mistake of using language that is confusing to their audience. Some managers have the misconception that complex words are necessary to bring clarity to the vision. Just the opposite is true. Simple and less complex words are best when communicating the vision. "Part of what makes a good idea good is its clarity and simplicity" (Adamson, Emswiller & Ollier, 1991). How President Kennedy announced his vision of a man on the moon is a great example of communicating a vision in a simple manner. Kennedy stated in a dramatic television news conference that "we would put a man on the moon before the end of the decade." He did not bog the public down in the nuts and bolts of telemetry, guidance systems, and lunar landing modules (Adamson, Emswiller & Ollier, 1991). "Words are the currency of ideas. We devalue that currency when we express ourselves in pat phrases, jargon, and words that pose instead of words that work" (Adamson, Emswiller & Ollier, 1991). Managers should take Winston Churchill's advice that "old words are good, short words are better, and old, short words are best of all" (Adamson, Emswiller & Ollier, 1991).

Everything managers do and do not do is observed and interpreted by their employees. Exhibiting behavior that even remotely appears to contradict the vision will undermine the manager's credibility when it comes to promoting direction (Parker, 2001). "A good vision is a vision that is lived constantly and consistently" (Dolak, 2001). It is important that powerful language be used when leaders are communicating the vision. "Successful leaders use metaphors and figures of speech; they give examples, tell stories, and relate anecdotes; they draw word pictures; and they offer quotations and recite slogans" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Metaphors are an extremely powerful way for managers to communicate the vision. According to Kouzes & Posner (1995), metaphors give vividness and tangibility to the manager's vision. The words of Rev. King Jr. are perfect examples of how metaphorical expressions can bring a vision to life. Rev. King's skillful usage of words gave listeners a visceral feel for his vision (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Managers learn to master the richness of figurative speech so that they can paint the word pictures necessary to effectively communicate the meaning of the vision (Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

Managers must use positive communication and convey conviction when unveiling the vision. When the vision is communicated, the manager should show enthusiasm and excitement. Enthusiasm and emotions are infectious, so managers should let them show. Managers should speak clearly and quickly while making eye contact. All of these signals are cues to others that the manager is personally excited about the vision (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Speaking of the vision "from the heart" is very important. In order for managers to speak of the vision from the heart, they must believe in the vision without a doubt. If they do not have faith, they may fail at communicating the vision before getting started. If managers experience difficulty imagining the vision, it will be almost impossible for them to communicate the vision convincingly.

An organization's vision is one of the cornerstones of organizational survival. Managers must identify ways to effectively communicate the vision to employees, so those employees feel a sense

of ownership and excitement. The vision may fail without buy-in from employees. According to Kouzes & Posner (1995), employee ownership and excitement will foster productivity and efficiency in an organization. Managers can promote a good work environment through a clear and solid vision statement. It is important that managers carry the message of the vision to the employees of an organization. Thus, to be successful, managers must repeat the vision, make it visible, live it, make it simple, and deliver it with power, optimism, and passion.

COMMUNICATION: SKILL IMPROVEMENT

How employees accomplish individual tasks helps to determine the success rate of the organization. Effective communication is an essential element governed by the constraints of time. The value that organizations place on time sets the limits at which employees strive to convey their ideas. Time is the one resource which can never be rolled back in determining priorities. Thus, it is important to become a competent communicator. Good communicators get ahead in business organizations, whereas poor communicators most likely will not advance to a position of greater responsibility. What is a manager's time worth in training to become well-versed? Considering a standard of 240 working days at eight hours for a typical business year, how does a manager contribute to the success or failure of the organization?

Noise interferes with the exact transmission of the intended message, and feedback provides the sender with a return message from the receiver. "Words have both denotative and connotative meanings. The denotation is the dictionary meaning. The connotation is the special meaning of the word based on the individual's experiences and perception" (Kleen & Treece, 1998). Words and slogans influence our professional lives, just as the history of our civilization has numerous languages that are constantly changing. "Aside from the emotional effect, words have their own particular shade of meaning due to cultural diversity in our global community" (Kleen & Treece, 1998).

Figuring out the puzzle of communication is a difficult process. As a matter of principle and in order to survive, organizations must work for higher quality in products, service, and relationships with personnel (Kleen & Treece, 1998). Successful meetings and conferences depend on planning an agenda, skillful conducting of the event, and cooperation by participants. The unstated theme for this success is effective communication between members.

In order to advance one's communication skills, a foundation of faults must be examined in order to acquire the small increments toward success. For example, one may ask, "What is my personal style in conveying ideas to others? Do I phrase the question: 'Would you like to sit down?' or 'Sit down?'" The verbal language directed towards others could weaken or strengthen one's vocal attributes that could lead to visual cueing to reinforce the message.

CONCLUSION

An organization's ability to communicate is an important cornerstone for survival. Managers must identify ways to effectively communicate their ideas, methods, and vision to employees. By doing this, employees experience a sense of ownership and excitement in collaboration. The communication process will fail without buy-in from employees in achieving organization goals. As the enlightenment spreads throughout the organization, employees will communicate not only from department to department, but also from country to country in shaping the 21st century. An arena of common issues bonded with effective communication will unify the workforce in producing a structure for commercialization.

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COMMUNICATING WITH MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS: BUILDING EFFECTIVE UNIVERSITY WEB SITES

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ABSTRACT

Most organizations use their Web sites to communicate in some way with their stakeholders. For-profit companies use their Web sites to sell products and services, not-for-profit organizations use their Web sites to communicate with their constituencies and supporters. University Web sites have a more complex communications role. These sites must convey information to a broad range of constituencies, each of which has significantly different information needs. Further, universities have been slow to recognize the need for a comprehensive high-level strategy for managing the design and implementation of their Web sites. This paper offers an analysis of the issues universities face in designing and implementing their Web sites and presents some solutions to problems that universities face in these undertakings.

INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web (Web) has rapidly become one of the most widely used communications media in the history of the world. The number of Web sites exceeds 45 million (Netcraft, 2003) and the number of Web pages is well over five billion (Bergman, 2000; .OCLC, 2003). These numbers are increasing at an increasing rate each year (McCollum, 1997; Netcraft, 2003).

The purposes and scope of Web sites have increased greatly, but few businesses today manage them well (Ramsey, 2000). The tools that companies have developed over the years to manage software development projects are designed to help those companies meet the needs of their current customers and operate more effectively within existing value chains (Schwalbe, 2001), not to create new ways of communicating via the Web.

Today, businesses use their Web sites for everything from selling products and services to ordering materials and supplies to communicating with employees, customers, and vendors (Ruud and Deutz, 1999). Other organizations use their Web sites for a variety of communication and marketing functions with their constituencies (Schneider, 2003). Universities are unusual because they have a larger number of distinct constituencies than other organizations. In addition, each of

a university's constituencies has differing information needs. These differing needs mean that university Web site users each arrive at the site with a different set of expectations.

This paper offers an analysis of the issues universities face in designing and implementing their Web sites to meet those varied user expectations and presents some solutions to the problems that universities face in meeting the communication and marketing challenges of this new medium.

BUILDING USEFUL AND EFFECTIVE WEB SITES

The task of building a good Web site is not easy. Many companies have found it difficult to develop new information systems and Web sites that work with those systems to create new markets or reconfigure their supply chains (Tattum, 2000). In the past, companies that have had success in exploring new ways of working with their customers and suppliers by reconfiguring supply chains have had the luxury of time, years in many cases, to complete those reconfigurations (Keil, Cule, Lyytinen, and Schmidt, 1998; McConnell, 1996). The user demands of today do not allow any organization that kind of time to build an effective Web site.

Designing useful and effective Web sites is not easy for any entity (Nielsen and Tahir, 2001). It becomes especially difficult for organizations that need to meet many different site visitor expectations (Nielsen, 2000). Universities have been widely criticized for not understanding the needs of student Web site visitors (Agosto, 2002; Giving the Web the New College Try, 2000; Raisman, 2000), for failing to include development and fund raising opportunities on their Web sites (Bjorhovde and Dietlin, 1999; Rolnick, 1998), and for missing important points in Web site architecture (Chen and Macredie, 2002; Middleton and McConnell, 1999). Some critics have even criticized universities for simply having "bad Web sites" (DeSimone and McRae, 2002; Raisman, 2003).

UNIVERSITY WEB SITES

In the early days of the Web, many universities launched a simple Web site that was designed by a creative information systems employee or student intern. Some university Web sites were even the results of class projects. As such, these Web sites were often a demonstration of the students' use of the latest technologies rather than an effective communications device on which the university could rely. As more universities realized the marketing potential of the Web, they began to hire professional Web development firms to build their sites (McCollum, 1999). Larger schools began to build their own staffs of Web designers (University of Georgia, 1999). Unfortunately, hiring Web development firms or creating an internal staff of Web designers each cost a lot of money and, are seldom found in university budgets as continuing line items.

Despite these attempts to professionalize the development of Web sites at universities, most schools still had inadequate Web sites (McCollum, 1999; Mechitov, Moshkovich, Underwood, and

Taylor, 2001). Many schools created their Web design team within their information systems departments, reflecting a common misunderstanding that Web design was a technical process rather than a communications process. This misunderstanding was prevalent early in the Web's history, but most for-profit organizations changed their approaches long before universities did. As company Web sites became important engines for creating sales and reducing costs, for-profit organizations moved the responsibility for Web design and operations out of information technology departments and into operating departments.

At universities, a similar shift took place, but it occurred much later and was not as widespread. Many schools still have not moved the responsibility of Web site design and operations out of their information technology departments. Even worse, some schools have not recognized that the Web requires a strategic response and have allowed each department and academic unit to create their own Web presences. This Balkanization of the Web communications effort has led to uncoordinated, poorly performing Web sites for many schools.

MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS

A university Web site must meet the needs of a diverse collection of stakeholders who might visit the Web site for a variety of reasons. Internal university users of a campus Web site might include students, faculty, and administrative staff. However, McCollum (1999) reports that between 60 and 70 percent of the Web page accesses on university sites come from outside their campuses. Thus, students, faculty members, and administrative staff members together make up fewer than half of a university site's visitors.

The largest single group of off-campus Web site users are prospective students. A recent study found that a school's Web site was the third most important sources of information for prospective students (Educause Review, 2000). As the level of computer use by young people increases, that ranking will only increase (Raisman, 2000). Also, the use of university Web sites by parents of prospective students is increasing, too (Luna, 2002). One innovative example of a university Web site element directed at parents of prospective students is the portion of San Diego State University's (SDSU) Web site that includes admissions information in Spanish (Sanchez, 2002). A significant number of SDSU's potential applicants have parents who are not fluent in English. Despite the importance of this stakeholder group to universities, many schools do not use their Web sites to communicate to that group effectively. For example, Raisman (2003) found that 86 percent of the university Web sites he surveyed did not provide any e-mail addresses or other contact information for admissions staff members.

Another important stakeholder group for undergraduate programs includes the parents of current students. The parents of current students are interested in a much different information set than their children. Schools that have large graduate and professional programs have yet another slightly different group of stakeholders; the spouses and children of current graduate students.

An important constituency for any university is its donor pool. Once again, this stakeholder group can be divided into alumni, area businesses, and other friends of the university. Each of these subgroups has somewhat different interests and can be best served by a separate set of information in the university Web site.

In addition to being potential donors, members of the local business community can be important sources of jobs for graduates of the university and for internships. Members of the business community are also prime candidates for research funding and joint research projects in many cases. These information needs can be targeted with a specific section of the Web site. Prospective employees of the university are also an important external constituency.

To summarize, the main categories of stakeholders who might visit a university Web site to obtain information or interact with the school in some way include: current students, current faculty, current administrative staff, prospective students, prospective employees (faculty and administrative staff), parents (and other family members) of current students, parents of prospective students, alumni, friends of the university, and the local business community. In certain cases, other stakeholders might be present and very important. For example, a school with a religious affiliation might want to address church, denomination, or religious order constituencies on its Web site.

We have identified some overall quality issues and some specific stakeholder issues that a university Web site must address to be truly effective. In the next two sections, we outline some strategies and solutions that schools might use to deal with these issues.

STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS FOR OVERALL QUALITY ISSUES

Quality assurance is extremely important for a university site. Spelling, grammar, or factual errors cannot be tolerated on a university Web site. Few persons would send their children to an institution of higher learning that signals its lack of quality in this basic way. More easily overlooked are the problems presented by broken links or pages that do not work in a particular browser. Quality assurance should be centralized to ensure that a high level of consistency and quality is maintained in the site. Every Web page should be cleared by a quality assurance person (or department) before it is added to the school's site. Link checking programs should be run at least once each week to ensure that any links on the site are working. If they are not, a stub page should be created that explains why the link does not lead to a currently active page.

Timeliness and currency of information included in the Web site is very important. The university should establish a policy for the rotation of dated material and for the deletion of historical information that is no longer timely or relevant. Search engines will index most of the pages on the school's Web site and a prospective student could easily find herself directed by a search engine to an announcement of an "upcoming" campus social event that occurred three years ago.

The enforcement of a consistent look and feel is a key element in the communication of an image of quality. Thus, the basic format of all Web pages should be specified and monitored by a central authority. One good way to do this is to provide templates of the approved basic page layouts to all academic units and university departments that will be developing content for the Web site.

Other than specifying technologies and helping with things such as the Web page templates, the Chief Information Officer and the information systems departments of the university should not be a major part of the Web site policy setting and strategy development effort. These activities should be driven by the mission and goals of the university and should be undertaken at the highest levels of university administration with contributions by marketing, development, alumni relations, enrollment management, and other relevant university administrative departments and academic units.

Many members of the academic community will bristle at the enforcement of uniform standards for Web pages. The tradition of academic freedom often seeps into the dialogue that occurs at universities about administrative actions that have little to do with academic freedom. Web page rules are often one example of this. A good way to handle the issue if it arises is to allow faculty members to place Web pages in sections of the Web site that are protected by a login requirement and a password. This is easy to implement and prevents non-conforming Web pages from being perceived as part of the intentional public image that the university is communicating to its external stakeholders.

A good search engine for the site is extremely important and fairly hard to create. The intelligent indexing of the pages and content on the site is important, but can be difficult to do well (Nielsen, 2000). Most good search engine tools cost money and they all take time to install and configure properly. Very few schools have devoted the time and money to the creation of effective search engines and other site navigation tools, such as site maps and breadcrumb headers.

Like it or not, it is time for universities to bite the bullet and take Web site design and implementation seriously. Major corporations have realized that the only way to maintain a respectable Web presence that generates sales and reduces operating costs is to spend some money. A typical commercial Web site for a company with the revenues and employee headcount of a medium-sized university would cost between \$100,000 and \$2 million to create and between \$50,000 and \$1 million annually to maintain (Barsh, Kramer, Maue, and Zuckerman, 2001; Randall, 1999; Rogers, 1999; Schneider, 2003).

STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS FOR SPECIFIC STAKEHOLDER ISSUES

The most important thing that a university can do is to identify each category of stakeholders that are essential to its mission and goals. Once those categories have been identified, the Web site can be designed around the needs of those stakeholders. A common mistake made by many

universities is to model the Web site after the internal organizational structure of the institution. The home page has links to each school or college and to various administrative departments.

Although such a design might be helpful for internal constituencies (and there is some evidence that it is not even particularly helpful for them), it is completely useless for external constituencies. A prospective student visiting the Web site who is looking for a class in computer graphics would have no idea where to begin searching a site that is organized by internal function. The computer graphics class could be taught in the college of arts and sciences, in the business school, in a college of art and design, or in the department of extended studies. Thus, the most important element of a university Web site is to have a branching home page.

Visitors arriving at a site's home page should see a series of links that direct them to the part of the Web site that has been designed for them. The home page should have a link for each major category of stakeholder. Any critical action that a visitor is likely to want to take on the site should be no more than three clicks from that home page. For example, a donor should be able to charge a gift to her credit card, a student should be able to enroll in a course, and a corporate recruiter should be able to schedule an interview with a graduating student with no more than three clicks from the home page.

Accomplishing this design feat requires that the Web designers put themselves in the shoes of the site visitors. In turn, this requires the design team to have identified each category of stakeholders and learned about their needs before beginning the design of the Web site (much less its implementation).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined some of the problems and issues that universities have faced and continue to face in designing and implementing effective Web sites that meet the needs of their varied constituencies. The paper offers some suggestions for strategies and operational solutions that can help universities create useful Web sites that convey a suitable Web presence to internal and external stakeholders who visit the site.

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WRITING YOUR WAY INTO A JOB: HOW EFFECTIVE USE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CAN MAKE OR BREAK THE JOB SEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides job-seekers with seven ways to write better cover letters and résumés through effective use of English. Techniques for writing effective cover letters and résumés are discussed, with special attention given to writing style, word choice, and the importance of editing. Examples of English-related errors in cover letters and résumés were gleaned from applications made to a large metropolitan hospital.

INTRODUCTION

In today's difficult job market, job-seekers must truly stand out among the field of applicants to even be considered for employment. Busy recruiters often face a flood of applications for a single position, and only the people who present a consistently excellent application package receive attention. Therefore, the slightest careless error on a cover letter or résumé can remove a candidate from consideration. A sample of applicants' cover letters and résumés from a large metropolitan hospital in the Mid-South revealed numerous instances of sloppy writing, unfortunate typos, and inappropriate style--mistakes the applicants could easily have avoided. This paper discusses how to construct a cover letter, résumé, and application to boost job-seekers' chances of getting their résumés into the "interview" pile instead of the "reject" pile.

USE LANGUAGE APPROPRIATE TO THE SITUATION

Résumés and cover letters should be written in a professional tone. They should read like business communications, meaning that slang should be avoided, as should any technical jargon not relating specifically to the position of interest.

Sometimes applicants attempt to stray from this formal style in their cover letters and résumés, believing that their personalities are unable to shine through such a rigid format. Often the "personality" is inserted through punctuation that has no place in these documents. One enthusiastic applicant for an information technology position ended his introductory paragraph with the question, "May I tell you about my many qualifications?" When the applicant asks questions to which the answer is pre-determined (he obviously planned to list his attributes, because the remainder of the

page was full of words), recruiters take the application less seriously. Exclamation points are also jarring in the context of a cover letter. Richardson (1998) interprets the exclamation point as an attempt to tell him how to feel, and advises applicants to "save punctuation meant to evoke emotion for love letters."

Other applicants attempt to inject their letters with personality by writing in a colloquial, friendly style. However, the people scanning applications are seeking not friends but qualified candidates. One applicant shared this bit of information at the bottom of her résumé: "Interests: I enjoy spending time with my oldest daughter, taking long walks with my boyfriend, and curling up with a good magazine at night." Not only was her style more suitable to a personal ad, but instead of considering her qualifications, the recruiters were left pondering why she only enjoyed spending time with her oldest daughter. Writing style can be just as much a distraction as it can be an asset, and applicants must take care to choose an appropriate style.

One final caution: the e-mail address used on résumés should make a professional impression (Tyler, 2003; Goins, 2004). Would you hire msdominatrix@hotmail.com? With so many free e-mail programs available, it is easy to set up a more professional-sounding address for use in application materials.

BE CONCISE

According to JobStar Central, a Web site devoted to aiding applicants in their job search, it may take less than thirty seconds for a recruiter to judge whether a résumé should be discarded or thoroughly considered (What is a resume?, 2003). In other words, applicants have to make a good impression quickly. Résumés should not be longer than two pages, and they should have ample white space so the reader can focus on qualifications rather than be forced to navigate through a huge block of words with no point of entry (Bumpus, 2003).

Omitting first-person pronouns gives résumés a streamlined feel. According to Bumpus (2003), "The words 'I', 'me', 'my', 'mine', or 'our' should never, ever appear in a résumé." They are unnecessary--the content of your résumé is obviously about you--and can cause sentences to become repetitive. Compare a paragraph where every sentence begins with "I" to one where every sentence begins with an action word, such as "represented," "implemented," or "created." Full sentences are not required in a résumé as they are in a cover letter, so use words economically to give each one maximum impact. Bullet points are an excellent tool for résumés because they are much more easily readable than lengthy sentences (Tyler, 2003).

BE CAREFUL WITH BIG WORDS

Some job applicants believe that to make an impression in a cover letter, they need to impress the recruiter by using big words. This can go wrong in two ways: the words are misplaced or (worse) nonexistent, or the words are correct but weigh down the material.

Nothing can send a recruiter into peals of laughter faster than a word used woefully out of context. One application contained the sentence: "Through the years I have found that most people when put to test will rise above their diversities and improve their outlook." She must have meant that people would rise above their adversities, but it was not clear whether or not she thought diversities were a sure obstacle to a good outlook. This is a good example of how larger words can be tricky; had she used the word "problems" or "weaknesses" instead, the sentence might have been better (although she would have been better served to cut the irrelevant sentiment entirely).

This next sentence might have been a decent start had the writer simply used an easier word. "Objective: To become a great asset to your corporation by performing and utilizing exceptional customer service skills apprehensively through previous experience." Instead of using the clearer "gained through previous experience," the writer trips up on "apprehended" and winds up completely confusing the meaning of her sentence. Because apprehending something is certainly not the same as being apprehensive of something, the writer has distorted her meaning, mixed up her parts of speech, ruined her sentence, and taken herself out of contention for the job.

Worse even than a misplaced or misused word is one that has been completely invented for the purposes of the letter. Another applicant wrote that his objective was "to be a profident and zealous employee." Would that be "profitable," "proficient," or a combination of either of those two with "confident?" This (and the hundreds of others like it) is one of those mistakes even the notoriously unreliable spell-check would never miss, and it is thus the most inexcusable of writing mistakes. When applicants turn in materials that are expected to represent their best work, recruiters dismiss them immediately as lazy if they find errors this obvious.

Even if applicants are certain that every word big and small in their application is correct, an abundance of big vocabulary words can make cover letters difficult to read. While the avoidance of overused words and phrases can make for an excellent cover letter, job application materials are not the place to show off a large vocabulary. Remember that a cover letter is a form of business communication and not a literary document. Readers want their information fast and easily understood, and a tangle of big words slows them down. It can also make applicants look haughty, as though they cannot simply say what they mean without garnishing every sentence with fancy vocabulary.

Use the words that are relevant to what you are saying, but do not go overboard. If you worked with a large customer base, say so--do not say you worked with "a plethora of customers." Better yet, quantify the amount of customers you worked with--now you are both specific and easily understood. A good rule of thumb for checking vocabulary in a cover letter is that if you have to

use a thesaurus to think of a more impressive-sounding word, you are probably better off sticking with the word you had in mind.

WRITE CONFIDENTLY

To make a good impression and force the recruiter to sit up and take notice, applicants must be both interesting and self-assured. The words they choose must convey their strengths effectively, and to do this the words themselves must be strong.

Bumpus (2003) asserts that passive voice phrases such as "responsible for" and "duties included" weaken the résumé. Allen (1998) suggests that action verbs such as "designed," "organized," "controlled," and "monitored" enliven the résumé. As an illustration of how active verbs create a better impression than passive phrases, compare the following two openers to a résumé:

1. "Job Title: Corporate Account Executive. Responsibilities included servicing multiple customer accounts, following up on sales calls, and writing monthly sales reports."
2. "Job Title: Corporate Account Executive. Serviced five major corporate accounts totaling more than \$1 billion in annual revenue. Contacted customers twice monthly to ensure continuous customer satisfaction. Created monthly reports charting sales data and linking revenue to company performance."

The writer of the second paragraph uses action verbs to begin her sentences, and she follows through with specific details. Her description of her job duties shows confidence that her accomplishments qualify her for consideration. The writer of the first paragraph lumps all her duties together, creating a dull first impression. She does not tell the reader that her responsibilities led to meaningful results. The description of the same job duties is watered down in the first paragraph and enlivened in the second because the writer gains confidence and uses active language to catch the reader's attention.

USE CONCRETE WORDING

In the previous section, it was mentioned that quantifying something rather than using more general terms can make a letter or résumé easier to evaluate because it is more specific. Describing yourself and your accomplishments with generic phrases does not market you--it puts the recruiter to sleep. Judy Rosemarin, president of the career management firm Sense-Able Strategies, Inc., advises applicants not to describe themselves with stock phrases such as "a creative problem solver

and team player who thrives on challenge, excels under pressure, and continually exceeds corporate goals," because these words say nothing about the candidate--they are "fluff" of the sort recruiters see every day (Marcus, 2002).

Numbers can provide applicants with a competitive edge that words like "many," "large," and "extensive" cannot. Richardson (2001) states that numbers "show magnitude of achievement" and "offer concrete evidence that's rarely questioned." Numbers illustrate exactly what you achieved in a credible way that will not leave the reader guessing.

Employers' advertisements can be vague as to the requirements of a job, but that does not mean applicants have to be. The more specific applicants can be about their strengths and accomplishments, the better chance they will have. If the advertisement for your job of choice requires someone who has managed a large workforce, write about your history of managing a department of 150 employees. The number gives the reader a clearer picture of your experience and allows him or her to determine whether you are a good match for the job.

A résumé with the right balance of numbers and descriptive sentences can lead the recruiter to the right information about the applicant more quickly. A few well-placed numerals can immediately catch the reader's eye because they stand out from the words on the rest of the page. If the reader first notices that you were responsible for increasing revenues by 75 percent, you drove annual sales up from \$1.5 million to \$3.2 million in a year, or you managed a department serving 1,000 customers, they will be intrigued by these statistics and give the rest of your résumé more careful attention.

Remember, too, that more and more employers are scanning paper résumés into computer databases or requesting that applicants submit electronic résumés. Concrete, specific terms make it easier for a keyword search to land on your résumé (Cohen, 2003).

CONNECT BUZZ WORDS TO RESULTS

Reading dozens or even hundreds of applications for the same position, recruiters grow weary of hearing the same terms over and over again. Phrases like "I'm a team player," "I bring many strengths to the table," and "I am seeking a job where I can best utilize my skills" become virtually meaningless as applicant after applicant uses them to generically describe themselves and their accomplishments. While buzz words relating to certain skills can be useful, especially in electronic résumés, they must be used carefully (Cohen, 2003). Buzz words and phrases are often tossed in, whether or not they describe the applicant or apply to the job in question. Many employers are suspicious of buzz phrases used to puff up the applicant's prior accomplishments or, worse, to hide problems (Bing, 2002). The key to crafting a résumé that stands apart is connecting buzz words (and industry-specific phrases) to real results.

With the availability of professional résumé-writing services and word-processing software that can quickly generate résumé documents, applicants are often tempted to create one formula and stick

with it (Allen, 1998). However useful these services may be, they will likely create a generic portrait if the applicant does not add information about his or her individual accomplishments. A résumé must move beyond overused phrases that virtually anyone could apply to themselves and include actual facts about the person. The cover letter provides an opportunity to expand on the information presented in your résumé, and it gives you the space to "describe your experiences not only in terms of what you have actually done, but in terms of what you have learned from the experiences and how they will help you in the future" (Anson & Schwegler, 2003). If applicants have properly researched the company to which they are applying, they can even connect their past experience to the values and objectives of the prospective employer.

Focusing your résumé on the specific position to which you are applying, rather than creating one résumé and sending it to many different companies, increases your chances of being distinctive. When you use only one résumé, the temptation is to give a more general description of yourself when it would be better to explain how your work history connects to an individual position. If you do not relate your qualifications to the specific job, you force the reader to guess why you would make a good candidate. Most recruiters do not have time to put in the extra effort and will move on to a candidate who is more obviously suited to the position. The only way to make yourself stand out from other résumés containing the same basic message is to demonstrate exactly what makes you the best candidate.

EDIT YOUR APPLICATION MATERIALS

This is the single most important thing you can do before you submit a résumé and cover letter: read over them. After you read your documents and make changes, have someone else read over them. So many embarrassing mistakes could be avoided if all applicants took the time to give their application materials a careful reading before turning them in.

Because a recruiter's initial scan determines whether an application is immediately discarded or saved for more thorough review, careless errors are absolutely unacceptable. A particularly glaring typo or a grammatically sloppy first sentence can sink an applicant within the first few seconds. If your objective, like one hospital applicant, trumpets your ability to "work well in a fast-pasted environment," recruiters will consider you their laugh for the day rather than their next hire. They expect a polished presentation of applicants' best work, which is why editing application materials is absolutely essential.

First and foremost is an often-repeated rule: never rely on word-processing software to check your spelling and grammar for you. Trusting in spell-check can lead to mistakes like the aspiring cosmetologist who wrote on her résumé that she hoped one day to own her own "saloon," or the man who assured the reader he worked well under "litter supervision." With the advent of word-processing tools that automatically correct what they perceive to be common errors, résumé

writers may not even notice when the wrong words are substituted because their fingers slipped on the keyboard. The resulting errors in meaning can be very embarrassing.

An important corrective to overuse of software programs is having another person read your résumé and cover letter before you submit them (Tyler, 2003). They may catch more than just typos or misspellings; they can help you see what you are actually saying in your letter instead of only what you intended to say. A secondary editor, especially one skilled in English, can be invaluable in helping you use the right language and avoid unnecessary mistakes that could lessen your chances at an interview. Having an editor who is familiar with the terminology of the field to which you are applying can be an additional bonus.

Certain application situations, such as on-site electronic applications, can present obstacles to completing a fully edited set of materials. When filling out an electronic application at a prospective employer's offices, applicants are often given the option to write in or attach a résumé and cover letter. So that you can be certain your résumé and cover letter are unhurried and error-free, you should always bring an electronic copy with you on a disk or CD-ROM. Typing in a cover letter on the spot leaves no time for reflection and careful editing. Even if you have a paper copy of your cover letter and can copy from that, you still leave yourself open to last-minute typographical errors. Having an already-polished set of materials available both on paper and electronically shows your preparation and leaves you less vulnerable to mistakes and language gaffes.

CONCLUSION

Cover letters and résumés jump out at recruiters for two reasons: they are polished documents describing a highly motivated, qualified candidate, or they are full of embarrassing errors that make the applicant seem careless and mistake-prone. The goal of any job applicant is to get noticed for the first reason--to capture someone's attention in a way that convinces them they have to call you for an interview. Good writing techniques can save you from getting noticed for the wrong reasons and enhance your chances of getting noticed for the right ones.

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ASSESSING HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN QUALITY: SURVEY DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

Researchers exploring theoretical relationships involving benefit satisfaction, attitudes toward the company providing the benefits, and general attitudes toward the health care industry have not considered how attitudes toward the industry might affect benefit satisfaction. A large manufacturing company commissioned a study of employee attitudes toward its health and welfare benefit plans that include measures of their attitude toward the industry as a whole. Over 90 percent of employees responded to the survey, providing a rich source for future examination. The paper provides an overview of the survey and initial work to assess measures of the three attitudes listed above. Suggestions for developing theory in this domain conclude the paper.

INTRODUCTION

Few would argue that the healthcare industry has problems at every level. Insurers (insurance companies), providers (doctors, hospitals, clinics, etc.), employers (who provide access to insurance to the majority of individuals), government agencies (Medicare, Medicaid, TennCare, etc.) and consumers all report deep concerns about the state of the industry (Abbott, 2003a). Each participant in the chain has its own concern.

Most research and commentary focuses on the problems facing plan designers, providers, and government agencies. Researchers have written considerably less about the challenges facing companies that strive to provide their employees with competitive, high quality benefit packages (Christopher, 2001; Danehower & Lust, 1992; Tremblay, Sire & Balkin, 2000; Williams, Malos & Palmer, 2002). Abbott (2003b) suggests that benefits, particularly health insurance, are not as important as other components of total compensation but they continue to be a critical element in an attractive total compensation package.

Ultimately, human resource managers still believe that, in spite of any negative perception of the industry as a whole, prospective employees consider benefit plans as a key component of overall compensation (Christopher, 2001). Many companies find that morale decreases when employees perceive that they are paying more money for reduced benefits. If, as traditional practice suggests,

benefit plans have a significant impact on recruitment, retention, and overall job satisfaction, then companies have a strong motive to assess employee perception of their benefit plan (Abbott, 2003b).

Consultants working with individual companies to design, acquire, and administer benefit plans have a direct interest in how an overall negative perception of the healthcare industry might impact their customers' evaluation of their individual benefit plans. Recently, a large manufacturing company and its benefit plan consultant decided to assess employee perceptions of the company's benefit plan and attitudes toward healthcare in general, their attitude toward the health insurance industry, and their willingness to accept enhanced benefits at an increased cost to them. The research team designed a survey specifically for the interest of the company, but it contained items that raise broader theoretical questions. This paper examines results from that study and makes recommendations about further inquiry into the relationship between broad social attitudes about healthcare and the design of company benefit plans.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The majority of the literature on benefit satisfaction comes from benefit planning practitioners (insurance companies and compensation consultants) and from human resource specialists. Since the radical changes in the health and welfare benefits industry beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been little theoretical and empirical work in the area (Christopher, 2001; Danehower & Lust, 1992; Tremblay et al., 2000; Williams et al., 2002). The research published since 1990 has focused on developing a benefit satisfaction construct (Danehower & Lust, 1992; Williams et al., 2002) and theoretical models that predict either benefit satisfaction (Danehower & Lust, 1992) or other organizational outcomes (Christopher, 2001; Tremblay et al., 2000).

Danehower and Lust (1992) developed a comprehensive model that predicts benefit satisfaction. Building on the work of Lust (1986, 1987, 1988, 1990), they suggested that benefit satisfaction is a product of two variables: the perceived quality of the plan and the perceived cost of the plan. Their model predicts that benefit satisfaction is a function of the perceived quality and the perceived cost of the benefit plan. The determinants of the two perceptual dimensions are the actual components of the plan (availability of benefits and level of coverage), the actual cost structure of the plan (including both the contribution of the company and the costs to employees, e.g., monthly contribution, copayments, deductibles, etc.), the needs, values, and expectations of the employees, and the prior experience of employees in using the benefit package. Two moderator variables complete the model. Employer communication can increase awareness of plan components, cost comparisons with other companies, the extent to which the plan meets their personal needs, and the comparison of current provisions to their prior experience. Perceived equity (both procedural and distributive) influences the relationship between the two predictors (perceived quality and cost) and satisfaction.

Tremblay et al. (2000) studied the relationship between equity perceptions and benefit satisfaction. They, too, proposed a distinction between benefit satisfaction and pay satisfaction and studied both independently. Their study broke equity perceptions into distributive justice and procedural justice components. They defined distributive justice as having three dimensions: the extent to which pay and benefits met individual needs (compared to other employees), internal equity (compared to higher level employees such as supervisors and management), and external equity (compared to the pay and benefits of similar organizations). Procedural justice consisted of three elements as well: the extent of employee participation in designing the pay and benefit plan, the amount and quality of communication regarding compensation provided by the company, and the degree to which employees were able to choose among a set of options. The study found that respondents made a clear distinction between pay and benefit satisfaction. Further analyses suggested that the procedural justice perception correlated with pay satisfaction while the distributive justice perception correlated with benefit satisfaction.

Christopher (2001) studied the relationship between employee evaluations of benefit plans and job related attitudes (job satisfaction, commitment, intent to turn over). The study also investigated the relationship between organizational justice and employee evaluations of benefit plans. Results suggest that benefit evaluation is a predictor of job related attitudes, particularly when the justice perceptions are positive.

Williams et al. (2002) developed a survey to further refine the benefit satisfaction construct. They developed a set of measures for the construct and performed confirmatory factor analysis to determine the discriminant validity of their scale and perceptions of the benefit system itself. Their results were mixed, with both common and unique antecedents to the two scales. They found a positive relationship between benefit satisfaction and job satisfaction.

Practitioners have focused their attention on dealing with the complexity and volatility of the health insurance industry. With benefit costs comprising approximately 30 percent of payroll expense per year and increasing at more than 15 percent per year (Anonymous, 2002), most consultants approach the issue from a design perspective--that is, they are concerned with strategies for designing plans that shift a fair burden of the cost to participants while still remaining attractive to prospective and current employees (Abbott, 2003b; Buchanan, 2002). Many encourage companies to involve employees directly in the plan design process (Abbott, 2003b). Others address concerns that arise from the merger and acquisition climate so common across industries (Buchanan, 2002).

Regardless of the strategy for building cost-effective plans that meet the needs of employees, data suggest that there is a gap between the quality perceptions of management and participants regarding benefits, particularly health insurance (Bates, 2004). Specialists generally agree that involvement, communication, cost restructuring, and optional benefit systems are key to offering a successful plan (Abbott, 2003a; 2003b; Buchanan, 2002). Another key to success is to monitor participants' perceptions of the plan regularly. Thoughtful plan designers will assess employee

attitudes regarding their understanding of plan elements, utilization of benefits, perceptions of quality, and need for additional benefits (Benefit survey reveals trends, 2002).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Survey research provides both an opportunity to meet the needs of companies that want to stay abreast of their employees' benefit needs and a chance to develop theoretical understanding of the relationship between benefits and more general attitudes. Recently, a large Mid-South manufacturing company executed a company-wide study to accomplish these objectives.

The sponsors of the research project were the Vice-President of Human Resources and the company's external benefit plan consultant. The size and scope of the company's operations have increased dramatically over the past decade as the firm engaged in an aggressive strategy of acquisition and integration, growing from a regional manufacturer into a fully integrated, global competitor. In all, the company has six divisions: manufacturing, distribution west, distribution east, retail, specialty (industrial) manufacturing, and corporate office. Approximately 90 percent of the employee base is in the retail division and distribution divisions. Each of the other divisions represents approximately three percent of the employee base. Only one division is unionized (specialty manufacturing).

The company is committed to offering an attractive general benefit package that will help ensure attraction and retention of high quality human resources at all levels. As with many companies that pursue aggressive, acquisition-oriented growth strategies, management has found that newly acquired subunits often express concern over the loss of benefits from prior management. Further, management became concerned that the frequency of cost increases, plan provider changes, and overall volatility of change in the healthcare industry might have resulted in employees becoming distrustful of the company's commitment to providing excellent benefits.

The company benefit plan consists of three broad components: healthcare (health and dental insurance), post-employment benefits (retirement plan, life insurance, long- and short-term income protection), and employee maintenance and development (vacation, tuition reimbursement, credit union). This study focused primarily on health insurance; however, the survey included a section on each of the other benefit programs.

At the time of the study, the company health insurance plan had two options. The Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) alternative allowed employees to pick from an approved network of physicians, hospitals, and specialists with increased costs for out-of-network treatment. This option was the most restrictive, but it had the lowest cost of the two. This option controlled out-of-pocket expenses for employees with a system of copays and low-level maximums for major procedures. The Preferred Provider Option (PPO) allowed participants to choose their own doctor while enjoying the benefits of copayments and other controls on out-of-pocket expenditures. It was more expensive than the HMO. The plan had been in place for two years at the time of this study.

A significant factor driving the interest in conducting the study was the company's concern that its recent wave of acquisitions might have resulted in differing perceptions across the company. Sponsors also were concerned about the general negative attitude many employees seemed to have regarding the health insurance industry. More specifically, sponsors were worried that negative perceptions of the industry might be influencing employee's level of satisfaction with the plan currently in place. Finally, sponsors wanted to give employees an opportunity to have input into the choice between reduced benefits at the current premium and enhanced benefits at a significantly higher premium.

The intent of the company's external consultant was to assist the company in designing programs to meet future needs. To that end, the consultant explored participant interest in add-on services and other optional benefit plans that might enhance the company's offering.

SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The company funded the design, distribution, and analysis of an extensive survey that management distributed to all employees in the firm. The survey addressed the following objectives:

Table 1: Research Agenda	
1.	To determine employee attitudes toward the company's health insurance plan(s).
2.	To get employee feedback on the company's non-health insurance benefits.
3.	To poll participants on their preference between keeping benefits at current levels with a 50% premium increase versus reducing prescription drug benefits in order to keep the increase at 15%.
4.	To gauge the interest among employees for additional, employee-paid benefits such as cancer insurance, vision care, etc.
5.	To help the company understand how it might do a better job of providing a competitive health and welfare benefit package for employees at every level.

In addition to the company's objectives, the sponsors agreed to include items useful in developing theory on the factors related to the perceived quality of healthcare benefits. These were participants' attitudes toward the healthcare industry and measures of quality and understanding of plan elements.

The survey consisted of the following sections: demographics; attitude toward the healthcare industry; experience with health insurance; understanding of the health insurance plan; quality of the health insurance plan; vote by participants on cost increases for the following year; understanding, quality, and usage of non-health benefits; interest in optional benefits; general

attitude toward total benefit package; and comments. The study used three variations of the survey depending on the health plan the employee used (HMO, PPO, or None). Copies of the surveys are available from the authors.

Participants provided the following demographic information: age, sex, family status (six combinations of marital status, spouse's employment status, and dependents), division, position (warehouse/production/driver, office/clerk, sales, salaried management), health insurance status, level of coverage, person who handles insurance claims, and reason for not using insurance plan (if applicable).

The section on attitude toward the healthcare industry consisted of 10 five-point Likert-type items asking respondents the extent to which they agreed with certain statements. These were:

Table 2: Healthcare Industry Items	
1.	The cost of healthcare is higher than it should be.
2.	The quality of healthcare is lower than it used to be.
3.	Most companies in the healthcare industry make a very high profit.
4.	Government should intervene to reduce the cost of healthcare for everyone.
5.	The rising cost of healthcare is really beyond the industry's control.
6.	I think that the healthcare industry does the best it can to keep costs down.
7.	All citizens have a basic right to high-quality healthcare.
8.	"Managed" care has been good for those who have it.
9.	I am willing to pay more to keep good insurance benefits.
10.	I am willing to have more "managed" care if it helps control what I pay for insurance.

Respondents also indicated the number of insurance companies they had used in the past (from one to more than three) and the length of time they had had insurance with these companies (less than one year to more than five years).

The section on the participant's understanding of the health plan was the same for employees using HMOs as for employees using PPOs. It consisted of 21 provisions of the health insurance plan, measured on a five-point scale: 1) completely unaware of the provision, 2) slightly aware, 3) aware, 4) somewhat familiar, 5) very familiar. The section closed with a general question regarding the respondent's overall understanding of the plan from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

The quality section differed slightly between the two plans (see results for specifics), with 18 items for HMO participants and 15 items for PPO participants. Respondents assessed the extent to

which each item met, exceeded, or fell below their expectations as follows: 1) much lower than I expected, 2) slightly lower than I expected, 3) meets my expectations, 4) slightly exceeds my expectations, 5) greatly exceeds my expectations. A sixth option allowed the respondent to mark NA, indicating no experience with this aspect of the plan. Two general questions followed. The first was an overall rating of the plan (from poor to excellent, as above). The second asked if the respondent intended to change from one plan to the alternative (stay, seriously consider changing, definitely plan to change).

Although this paper does not focus on the non-health benefit section of the survey, it is worth noting (for subsequent research) the contents of that section, which utilized the same type scales for understanding and quality on each of 12 elements of the benefit plan. The usage items ranged as follows: 1) never use, 2) seldom use, 3) occasionally use, 4) frequently use, 5) always use. The general benefits included:

1.	Vacation
2.	Short-term income protection
3.	Long-term income protection
4.	Holidays
5.	Tuition reimbursement
6.	Employee Assistance Program
7.	Life insurance
8.	Credit Union
9.	Retirement plan (401k)
10.	Optional life insurance for spouse and family
11.	Scholarship fund for dependent children
12.	Dental plan

The last section of the survey consisted of eight five-point Likert-type agreement scales (with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree") as follows:

Table 4: Benefit Satisfaction	
1.	I am confident that management is committed to providing excellent benefits.
2.	Compared with other companies, management pays a fair portion of our health insurance costs.
3.	I am glad to have a choice between HMO and PPO in our current health insurance.
4.	Our current health insurance plan is superior to the one we had before.
5.	Our Human Resources department is helpful when I have questions about benefits.
6.	Our benefit package is superior to most other companies.
7.	Our benefit package includes everything that employees need.
8.	Our benefit package is better than other companies in our industry.

SAMPLE

Of the company's approximately 2,000 employees, 1,950 returned surveys to the company. Of these, 126 were eliminated because of uninterpretable answers or failure to respond to a sufficient number of items to make the survey usable. The 1,824 respondents (94 percent response rate; note that results appear as a percent of the sample) have the following characteristics, with detail in tables below.

Table 5: Sample Characteristics	
1.	Age: 84.1% between 25 and 54
2.	Sex: 79.2% Male
3.	Family Status: 67.9% married; 58.4% with dependents under age 24
4.	Division: Manufacturing, 2.4%; Specialty Manufacturing, 2.7%; Distribution south, 33.1%; Distribution west, 9.2%; Retail, 49.9%; Corporate Office, 2.7%
5.	Position: Warehouse/Production/Driver, 55.1%; Office/Clerical, 19.7%; Sales, 6.5%, Management/Salaried, 18.7%
6.	Plan participants: HMO, 54.7%; PPO, 38.7%; No Plan, 6.6%; Insurance only with company, 87%; insurance with spouse, 66% (of non-participants)
7.	Level of coverage: 65% more than one person; 63% handle claims themselves
8.	Number of insurance companies: 77% two or more
9.	Years with company insurance: 53% less than three years

General demographic and personal information suggests that the vast majority of employees use the company's health insurance plan. Most employees have experience with different plans but have been with this company's plan less than three years, suggesting that they have experience with at least one other company's plan. The vast majority of employees (over 80 percent) work either in distribution or retail services. Some specific information about the respondents appears in Table 6.

Age		Sex		Family Status	
Under 25	6%	Male	79%	Single, No Dependents	19%
25 to 34	22%	Female	21%	Single, With Dependents	13%
35 to 44	35%			Married, Spouse Employed, no Dependents	17%
45 to 54	27%			Married, Spouse Employed, Dependents	34%
55 to 64	9%			Married, Spouse Not Employed, No Dependents	6%
Over 65	1%			Married, Spouse Not Employed, Dependents	11%

ATTITUDE TOWARD HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

The company agreed to survey employees on their attitude toward the industry because the project's sponsor believed that residual negative affect toward the industry was having a deleterious effect on employee attitudes toward the healthcare plan. Table 7 shows a summary of results for each item. The results include an abbreviated form of the item (see Table 2 for the full wording), the mean and standard deviation, and the percent of positive responses, i.e., a response of agree (4) or strongly agree (5). Results suggest that participants generally feel negative toward the industry as a whole. Over 76 percent of respondents believe high-quality healthcare is a basic right. Only 38 percent believe that managed care has been a positive thing for society. Over 70 percent believe that costs are higher than they should be, while nearly 77 percent believe that the industry does not do all it can to keep costs down. Nearly 60 percent believe that insurance companies make very high profits. Over half (54 percent) agreed that the government should intervene to keep costs down. Results were lukewarm for willingness to pay for and/or accept more managed care.

Table 7: Attitudes Toward the Healthcare Industry

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Percent Positive Agreement
Costs higher than they should be	3.9	1.12	71%
Quality lower than it used to be	3.2	1.25	45%
Insurance companies make high profits	3.8	1.06	59%
Government should intervene to reduce costs	3.4	1.43	54%
Rising costs beyond the industry's control	2.8	1.28	30%
Industry tries to keep costs down	2.5	1.21	23%
Healthcare a basic right	4.1	1.19	77%
Managed care has been good	3.2	1.04	38%
Willing to pay more for good insurance	3.0	1.28	45%
Willing to have more managed care	3.1	1.24	43%

UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTHCARE PLAN

Theoretical work in the area of benefit satisfaction typically has included some measure of understanding, either through communication or direct assessment of individual familiarity with plan components (e.g. Danehower & Lust, 1992). Practitioner work is consistent in urging plan administrators to communicate often so that individuals will understand their benefits more clearly (e.g. Abbott, 2003a, 2003b). In this study, the survey asked employees the extent to which they understood specific components of the healthcare plan. The survey items differed somewhat between the HMO and PPO plans; the results appear in separate columns with the overall mean included for those items common to both plans. A comparison of the means between the two groups revealed significant differences in levels of understanding between the two plans on some of the items. When the mean differs significantly (i.e. $p < .01$), an asterisk (*) appears beside the overall mean. A fourth column contains the percent of responses that show awareness or familiarity with the plan (Aware, Somewhat Familiar, or Very Familiar). Table 8 contains items common to both PPO and HMO respondents. Tables 9 and 10 contain items unique to the PPO and HMO respectively. The survey items appear in abbreviated form; the full survey is available upon request.

Table 8: Understanding of Healthcare Plan
(Items Common to Both PPO and HMO, n=1704)

Item	PPO	HMO	Overall	Percent Aware
Lifetime maximum	2.90	2.71	2.79*	32.3%
Amount of copayment	4.18	4.35	4.28*	78.5%
Amount of company contribution	3.11	2.95	3.02	39.3%
Preventive care	3.26	3.44	3.36*	49.7%
Emergency room	3.23	3.57	3.43*	50.4%
Inpatient hospital services	3.07	3.19	3.14	40.8%
Prescription drugs (pharmacy)	3.90	3.88	3.89	67.4%
90 day prescriptions (mail order)	3.33	3.28	3.30	49.2%
Cost of generic vs. brand name drugs	4.11	4.12	4.11	73.6%
Lab services	3.03	3.07	3.05	37.5%
Maternity	2.40	2.52	2.47	23.6%
Pre-admission process	3.07	2.90	2.97	38.1%
Availability of specialists	3.46	3.02	3.20*	44.5%
Overall understanding	3.31	3.33	3.32	43.7%

Table 9: Understanding of Healthcare Plan
(Items unique to PPO, n=706)

Item	Mean	Percent Aware
Choice among physicians	3.91	68.1%
Outside network costs	3.93	77.5%
Deductible/Stop-loss choices	2.92	35.4%
PPO flexibility vs HMO managed care	3.67	59.7%
Carrier discretion in treatment	2.90	36.6%
Carrier review for medical necessity	2.80	32.4%

Item	Mean	Percent Aware
Primary care physician (PCP) requirement	4.29	79.0%
Specialist referral procedures	4.04	71.4%
In-network requirement	3.82	64.7%
No payment for out-of-network services	3.07	40.7%
\$25 drug copayment	3.65	59.5%
HMO managed care vs. PPO flexibility	2.97	35.1%
PCP makes decisions on level of care	3.40	52.8%
Carrier makes some decisions about care	2.69	28.6%

In order to determine if the overall understanding reported by participants was related to their understanding of individual components, the researcher computed the mean of all understanding scores for both sets of participants. The mean for the PPO group is 3.32, compared to an overall understanding of 3.31. The mean for the HMO group is 3.36, compared to an overall understanding of 3.33. Neither score is significantly different, allowing for reasonable confidence that the participants' responses reflect their true opinion. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that participants in both plans understand the elements of the plan fairly well and comparably to each other.

PERCEIVED QUALITY OF THE PLAN

The items measuring quality focus on the participants' actual experience with the healthcare plan. Fifteen items were common to both PPO and HMO participants. One item was unique to the PPO while four were unique to the HMO. Tables 11-13 summarize the means for each plan. The Percent Positive column is the percentage of responses of 3 or higher (meets or exceeds expectations). This is a common measure of service quality used in many studies of quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). Significant differences ($p < .01$) between HMO and PPO participants on common quality items appear with an asterisk next to the overall mean for that item.

Table 11: Perceived Quality of Healthcare Plan
(Items Common to Both PPO and HMO, n=1704)

Item	PPO	HMO	Overall	Percent Positive
Quality of physicians available	2.77	2.90	2.84	70.4%
Availability of qualified specialists	2.76	2.87	2.82	68.7%
Quality of hospitals	2.86	3.03	2.96*	86.1%
Accuracy of claims processing	2.70	2.87	2.80*	67.2%
Carrier's helpfulness in solving claims problems	2.65	2.86	2.77*	65.2%
Helpfulness of carrier's 800 number	2.80	3.01	2.93*	70.3%
Helpfulness of carrier's Web site	2.70	2.85	2.79	70.8%
Quality of printed materials	2.91	3.13	3.04*	80.9%
Speed of claims processing	2.77	2.93	2.86*	70.5%
Dollar amount of copayments	3.11	3.29	3.21*	88.4%
Comprehensiveness of coverage	2.94	3.11	3.04*	80.9%
Ease of using the system	2.95	3.12	3.05*	78.6%
Overall quality of plan	2.99	3.13	3.08*	78.3%
Overall rating of health insurance plan	3.10	3.24	3.18*	82.5%

Table 12: Perceived Quality of Healthcare Plan
(Items unique to PPO, n=706)

Item	Mean	Percent Positive
Satisfaction with option selected	3.01	78.8%

Item	Mean	Percent Positive
Level of out-of-pocket expenses	3.23	83.7%
Satisfaction with PCP	3.43	86.3%
Decisions made by PCP	3.31	85.2%
Decisions made by carrier	2.96	75.7%

Unlike the understanding items, there was a significant discrepancy between the average rating of the individual quality items and the overall ratings. Two overall ratings measured the quality of the plan in terms of actual service received (overall quality of plan) and a general evaluation of the plan as a benefit (overall rating of the plan). For both PPO and HMO participants, the average rating of individual items was lower than the quality rating, which was, in turn, lower than the overall rating of the plan. For PPO participants, the average rating was 2.86, while the overall quality rating was 2.99 and the overall rating of the plan was 3.10. For HMO participants, the average rating of individual items was 3.07 with an overall quality rating of 3.13 and an overall plan rating of 3.24. The data suggest, therefore, that HMO participants rate their plan higher than PPO participants.

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH BENEFIT PACKAGE

As the key component of an employee's benefit package, the healthcare plan heavily influences overall perceptions of the benefits the company offers employees. Because satisfaction with the healthcare plan and the overall plan were assessed separately, it would be helpful to know the extent to which assessment of the healthcare plan correlates with overall measures of benefit satisfaction. To that end, the researcher analyzed the bivariate relationship between overall plan quality, overall rating, and eight broad measures of benefit satisfaction. Results appear in Table 14 (mean values for benefit satisfaction items) and Table 15 (correlation matrix). In Table 14, the Percent Positive column includes all responses of Agree or Strongly Agree. In Table 14, all correlations are statistically significant ($p < .01$). Small correlations (less than .30) may be the result of the large sample rather than the representation of practically significant relationships. The variables OQ and OR relate to the overall quality rating and overall plan rating in the previous section.

Item	Mean	Percent Positive
Company commitment to excellent benefits (MC)	3.88	72.3%
Company pays fair portion of HI costs (FP)	3.75	67.7%
Choice between PPO and HMO (CH)	4.17	76.7%
Current plan superior to previous plan (PS)	3.38	46.1%
HR department helpful with questions (HR)	3.68	55.8%
Benefits superior to other companies (BS)	3.46	48.0%
Benefits meet employees' needs (EN)	3.40	52.8%
Benefits superior to competitors (CS)	3.45	44.7%

	OQ	OR	MC	FP	CH	PS	HR	BS	EN
OR	.63								
MC	.26	.25							
FP	.27	.30	.66						
CH	.23	.25	.47	.51					
PS	.44	.46	.42	.44	.39				
HR	.20	.20	.45	.40	.37	.29			
BS	.33	.36	.53	.58	.42	.53	.43		
EN	.28	.30	.50	.49	.38	.44	.37	.65	
CS	.31	.31	.50	.55	.37	.50	.38	.73	.65

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Management drew certain conclusions about the attitudes of this sample seem reasonable, even prior to more sophisticated analytical techniques (comparison of results by groups, data reduction, regression analysis, etc.). These conclusions, discussed in more detail below, include:

1.	The employees' attitude toward the healthcare industry is somewhat negative.
2.	The employees' understanding of the healthcare plan is lower than management expected.
3.	The employees' quality perception of the healthcare plan is lower than management had hoped.
4.	The employees' quality perception of the overall plan is slightly higher than their perceptions of individual components of the plan.
5.	The employees' attitude toward the company as a benefit provider is much more positive than their perception of the healthcare plan.

Because the correlations between the various benefit satisfaction variables are so high, it seemed appropriate to see if they measured a single attitude. Factor analysis (see Table 16 below) shows that the eight items load on a common factor with all items loading significantly. Consequently, the researcher computed a composite variable (Benefit Satisfaction) to use in subsequent analyses. Cronbach's alpha for the composite scale is .88.

Table16: Factor Analysis	
Principal Components Extraction; Varimax Rotation	
Factor	Loading
MC	.771
FP	.790
CH	.651
PS	.677
HR	.603
BS	.841
EN	.769
CS	.804
Benefit Satisfaction: Mean = 3.64	

CONCLUSION

The academic literature on benefit satisfaction is sparse and inconclusive. To some extent this is attributable to the relatively low importance benefits have in determining overall satisfaction (Abbott, 2003a). The fact remains, however, that companies continue to strive to provide excellent benefits and spend an increasingly high percentage of their total compensation in the form of benefits, especially health insurance. Proactive companies, like the one that sponsored this study, will be wise to measure their employees' attitudes periodically to determine how satisfied they are with their health insurance and with the company as a provider of benefits.

In this case, there appears to be reasonable confidence in the employer as a benefit provider but a somewhat negative perspective toward both the health insurance industry in general and the health insurance plan the company provides. Future research should attend to the factors that predict these attitudes and investigate the fit between theoretical models of benefit satisfaction and this particular situation. Because the purpose of this paper is to describe the development of the survey and basic results, the question of more finely tuned relationships remains open. More specifically, subsequent work should focus on demographic factors predicting satisfaction, the relationship between understanding and quality perceptions, and the relationship between industry perceptions and attitudes toward the plan.

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