

Association for Business Communication  
Southwestern United States

2018 Refereed Proceedings  
March 7-10, 2018  
Albuquerque, NM

Laura Lott Valenti, President  
Kelly A. Grant, President-Elect and Program Chair  
Carol Wright, Secretary-Treasurer  
Kayla Sapkota, Historian  
Susan Evans Jennings, Past President

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## Editor's Note

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Welcome to the 44th meeting of the Association for Business Communication-Southwestern United States. Many thanks to the planners, program chairs, reviewers, presenters, and other contributors responsible for making this fantastic conference program possible. Special thanks go to Kelly Grant, President-Elect and Program Chair of ABC-SWUS, who has assembled a great program that will appeal to anyone who is interested in business communication pedagogy and research.

The program this year includes 31 presentations by authors from United States institutions across the country, as well as from India and South Africa. 2 full papers from the conference, 29 presentation abstracts, and 2 poster presentation abstracts are included in this proceeding. I would like to extend special thanks to the proposal and paper reviewers: Traci Austin, Jon M. Croghan, Tammy L. Croghan, Debbie D. DuFrene, Susan Evans Jennings, **Error! Bookmark not defined.** Margaret S. Kilcoyne, Ashley Nelson, Kayla Sapkota, Danica L. Schieber, Lucia Sigmar, Laura Lott Valenti, and Carol S. Wright.

Each year completed papers that are submitted for the program are considered for the Irwin/McGraw Hill Distinguished Paper Award. This year's distinguished paper was awarded to N. Lamar Reinsch and Vicki Gates. They will present their paper on Thursday, at 8:30 a.m. Also, please note that Judith L. Biss, has been posthumously awarded the 2018 Federation of Business Disciplines Outstanding Educator Award.

In these proceedings, you will also find information on previous program chairpersons, Distinguished Paper Award recipients, and recipients of the Outstanding Research and Outstanding Teacher awards.

Please make plans to join us next year in beautiful Houston, Texas for the 2019 Conference on March 13-16, 2019, at the Hyatt Regency Houston. The call dates for next year's papers and presentation proposals are October 1, 2018.

We hope you enjoy the 2018 conference program, and take this opportunity to share new ideas, make new contacts, and ignore your rapidly growing email inbox.

Remember, if you want something done write, ask a business communicator!

Danica L. Schieber  
Editor

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# **Future International, National and Regional Meetings**

## **2018 – 2019**

**For more information visit:**

**<http://businesscommunication.org/conferences>**

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2018 ABC Midwestern/Southeastern U.S. Regional Conference

April 12-14, 2018

Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

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2018 ABC Europe, Africa, and Middle East Regional Conference

July 11-13, 2018

University of Alcala, Spain

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Association for Business Communication 82nd Annual International Conference

October 24-27, 2018

Miami, FL, USA

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2019 Association for Business Communication-Southwestern United States

March 13-16, 2019

Houston, TX, USA

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### ABC-SWUS Program Chairpersons 1973 - Present

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2017-2018	Kelly A. Grant	1994-1995	Roger N. Conaway
2016-2017	Laura Lott Valenti	1993-1994	Donna W. Luse
2015-2016	Susan Evans Jennings	1992-1993	F. Stanford Wayne
		1991-1992	Beverly H. Nelson
2014-2015	Kathryn S. O'Neill	1990-1991	Marian Crawford
2013-2014	Traci L. Austin		
2012-2013	Randall L. Waller	1989-1990	Marlin C. Young
2011-2012	Lucia Sigmar	1988-1989	Sallye Benoit
2010-2011	Margaret Kilcoyne	1987-1988	Tom Means
		1986-1987	Lamar N. Reinsch, Jr.
2009-2010	Faridah Awang	1985-1986	Sara Hart
2008-2009	Marcel Robles		
2007-2008	Ann Wilson	1984-1985	Betty S. Johnson
2006-2007	Carolyn Ashe	1983-1984	Larry R. Smeltzer
2005-2006	Harold A. Hurry	1982-1983	Daniel Cochran
		1981-1982	Nancy Darsey
2004-2005	Lana W. Carnes	1980-1981	John M. Penrose
2003-2004	Marsha L. Bayless		
2002-2003	Betty A. Kleen	1979-1980	R. Lynn Johnson
2001-2002	William Sharbrough	1978-1979	Raymond V. Lesikar
2000-2001	Carol Lehman	1977-1978	Jack D. Eure
		1976-1977	Phil Lewis
1999-2000	William P. Galle, Jr.	1975-1976	Dale Level
1998-1999	Anita Bednar		
1997-1998	Timothy W. Clipson	1974-1975	Bette Anne Stead
1996-1997	Debbie D. Dufrene	1973-1974	Sam J. Bruno
1995-1996	William J. Wardrope		

**Call for Papers**  
**Federation of Business Disciplines**  
**Association for Business Communication**  
**Southwestern United States**  
**Houston, Texas**  
**March 13 - March 16, 2019**

Please submit a proposal or paper related to **business communication topics** for presentation at the 2019 ABC-SWUS Conference in Houston, Texas. Research papers or position papers related to **business communication topics** in the following areas are encouraged:

Communication Technology  
Innovative Instructional Methods  
International Business Communication  
Training and Development/Consulting  
Nonverbal Communication  
Legal and Ethical Communication Issues

Technology and Education  
Business Education Issues  
Paradigm Shifts in Communication  
Interpersonal Communication  
Executive/Managerial Communication  
Organizational Communication

- Papers or proposals should include a statement of the problem or purpose, methodology section (if applicable), findings (as available), a summary, implications for education and/or business, and a bibliography.
- If you are submitting a proposal only, it should contain 750 to 1,500 words and must be submitted on the ABC website: <http://www.businesscommunication.org>. Click on the link for the **2018 ABC-SWUS Conference**.
- If you are submitting a completed paper, please submit your proposal online as indicated above. Then e-mail the completed paper to [cwright@sfasu.edu](mailto:cwright@sfasu.edu) by **October 1, 2018**. All submissions must be in Microsoft Word.
- Personal and institutional identification should be removed from the body of the paper. Identify yourself and your institution only on the cover page. Submissions will be anonymously reviewed.
- A cover page is required with the title of the paper and identifying information for each author: name, institutional affiliation, address, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address.  
For your research to be considered for the Richard D. Irwin Distinguished Paper Award, you must submit a completed paper rather than a proposal by the submission deadline, **October 1, 2018**.
- Submitted papers should not have been previously presented or published, nor should they be under consideration or accepted for presentation elsewhere.

**FBD Statement of Academic Integrity**

Your paper should not have been previously published or previously presented at FBD. Please indicate to the Program Chair if your paper is currently under submission to another FBD association. If your paper is later accepted by another FBD association, it is your responsibility to notify the appropriate Program Chairs.

- Upon receiving notice of acceptance, all authors and co-authors are expected to **pre-register for ABC-SWUS and FBD** at <http://www.fbdonline.org>.

**Deadline: Papers and proposals must be received by October 1, 2018.**

**The deadline for submitting accepted papers to the Proceedings will be January 16, 2019.**

For information, contact Carol Wright, Program Chair, via e-mail at [cwright@sfasu.edu](mailto:cwright@sfasu.edu)

**Prentice-Hall and Thomson Learning Outstanding Educator Awards**  
for  
**The Association for Business Communication**  
**Southwestern United States**

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To be eligible for the award, recipients must have received the ABC-SWUS Outstanding Educator Award, must not be a previous recipient of either the Prentice-Hall or Thomson learning awards, must be a member of the Association for Business Communication, and must teach in the business communication discipline. This top tier ABC-SWUS award began in 2001 to honor outstanding educators in ABC-SWUS who were already recognized by our association. The award was sponsored by Prentice-Hall in 2001 and 2002, and by Thomson Learning in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007. The award winner must also have been recently active in the association as evidenced by attendance at recent ABC-SWUS conferences. The award winners are listed below:

2015	Lucia Sigmar, Sam Houston State University
2014	Margaret S. Kilcoyne, Northwestern State University
2013	S. Ann Wilson, Stephen F. Austin State University
2012	Marcel M. Robles, Eastern Kentucky University
2011	Harold A. Hurry, Sam Houston State University
2010	Geraldine E. Hynes, Sam Houston State University
2009	Roger N. Conaway, Tecnológico de Monterrey, campus San Luis Potosí
2008	Bobbie J. Davis, Southeastern Louisiana University
2007	Betty A. Kleen, Nicholls State University
2006	William Wardrobe, University of Central Oklahoma
2005	Betty S. Johnson, Stephen F. Austin State University
2004	Marsha L. Bayless, Stephen F. Austin State University
2003	Lillian H. Chaney, University of Memphis
2002	Debbie DuFrene, Stephen F. Austin State University
2001	Anita Bednar, University of Central Oklahoma



# The Association for Business Communication Southwestern United States Outstanding Researcher and Teacher Awards

These awards were developed and first awarded in 1992 to recognize the accomplishments of the region's members. Nominated candidates are evaluated by a panel of previous award winners. No awards were given in 1998, 2001, 2003, 2007 or 2013. The association began alternating the awards every other year in 2000 between researcher and teacher. In 2011 the Outstanding Teacher Award was renamed the Marlin C. Young Outstanding Teacher Award in honor and memory of his contributions to the ABC-SWUS organization. The recipients below each received a plaque and award of \$100 (the award was changed to \$200 in 2008):

2016 Geraldine Hynes, Outstanding Researcher Award	2002 Lillian H. Chaney, Outstanding Researcher Award
2015 Margaret Kilcoyne, Marlin C. Young Outstanding Teacher Award	2002 Jeré Littlejohn, Outstanding Teacher Award
2014 Lucia Sigmar, Outstanding Researcher Award	2000 William Sharbrough, Outstanding Researcher Award
2013 Brenda Hanson, Marlin C. Young Outstanding Teacher Award	1999 William Wardrope, Outstanding Teacher Award
2012 Susan Evans Jennings, Outstanding Researcher Award	1998 Betty Kleen, Outstanding Researcher Award
2011 S. Ann Wilson, Marlin C. Young Outstanding Teacher Award	1998 Robert Olney, Outstanding Teacher Award
2010 Margaret Kilcoyne, Outstanding Researcher Award	1997 Al Williams, Outstanding Teacher Award
2009 Harold Hurry, Outstanding Teacher Award	1996 Betty S. Johnson, Outstanding Researcher Award
2008 Roger N. Conaway, Outstanding Researcher Award	1995 Marsha L. Bayless, Outstanding Researcher Award
2008 Geraldine E. Hynes, Outstanding Teacher Award	1995 Anita Bednar, Outstanding Teacher Award
2006 Janna P. Vice, Outstanding Researcher Award	1994 Nelda Spinks, Outstanding Teacher Award
2005 Bobbye Davis, Outstanding Teacher Award	1993 Timothy W. Clipson, Outstanding Teacher Award
2004 William Wardrope, Outstanding Researcher Award	1993 F. Stanford Wayne, Outstanding Researcher Award
2003 Marcel Robles, Outstanding Teacher Award	1992 Debbie D. DuFrene, Outstanding Researcher Award
	1992 Beverly H. Nelson, Outstanding Teacher Award

The Association for Business Communication  
Southwestern United States  
**Irwin/McGraw-Hill Distinguished Paper Award Recipients**

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- 2017 Jon M. Croghan and Tammy L. Croghan  
*Improving Performance Evaluations: The Role of Intrapersonal Communication, Message Strategy, and Age*
- 2016 Melissa A. Barrett and Geraldine E. Hynes  
*The Little Creamery that Could: Weathering a Crisis and Maintaining Brand Loyalty*
- 2015 Mark Leonard, Marsha Bayless, and Timothy Clipson  
*Media Selection in Managerial Communication: Exploring the Relationship between Media Preference, Personality, and Communication Aptitude*
- 2014 Kathryn S. O'Neill and Gary L. May  
*Using Business Cases to Foster Critical Thinking*
- 2012 En Mao, Laura Lott Valenti, and Marilyn Macik-Frey  
*Status Update – “We’ve Got a Problem” – Leadership Crisis Communication in the Age of Social Media*
- 2011 Betty A. Kleen and Shari Lawrence  
*Student Cheating: Current Faculty Perceptions*
- 2010 Jose Guadalupe Torres and Roger N. Conaway  
*Adoption and Use of New Communication Technologies in an International Organization: An Exploratory Study of Text Messaging*
- 2009 Susan Evans Jennings, S. Ann Wilson, and Judith L. Biss  
*Is Email Out and Text Messaging In? Communication Trends in Secondary and Post-Secondary Students*
- 2008 Debbie D. DuFrene, Carol M. Lehman, and Judith L. Biss  
*Receptivity and Response of Students to an Electronic Textbook*
- 2007 William J. Wardrobe and Roger N. Conaway  
*Readability and Cultural Distinctiveness of Executives’ Letters Found in the Annual Reports of Latin American Companies*
- 2006 Janna P. Vice and Lana W. Carnes  
*Professional Opportunities for Business Communication Students That Go Beyond the Course Grade*
- 2005 Lillian H. Chaney, Catherine G. Green, and Janet T. Cherry  
*Trainers’ Perceptions of Distracting or Annoying Behaviors of Corporate Trainers*

- 2004 Patricia Borstorff and Brandy Logan  
*Argumentativeness and Verbal Aggressiveness: Organizational Life, Gender, and Ethnicity.*
- 2003 Ruth A. Miller and Donna W. Luce  
*The Most Important Written, Oral, and Interpersonal Communication Skills Needed by Information Systems Staff During the Systems Development Process*
- 2002 Roger N. Conaway and William Wardrope  
*Communication in Latin America: An Analysis of Guatemalan Business Letters*
- 2001 Annette N. Shelby and N. Lamar Reinsch Jr.  
*Strategies of Nonprofessional Advocates: A Study of Letters to a Senator*
- 2000 Donna R. Everett and Richard A. Drapeau  
*A Comparison of Student Achievement in the Business Communication Course When Taught in Two Distance Learning Environments*
- 1999 Susan Plutsky and Barbara Wilson  
*Study to Validate Prerequisites in Business Communication for Student Success*
- 1998 Jose R. Goris, Bobby C. Vaught, and John D. Pettit Jr.  
*Inquiry into the Relationship Between the Job Characteristics Model and Communication: An Empirical Study Using Moderated Progression Analysis*
- 1996 Beverly Little, J. R. McLaurin, Robert Taylor, and Dave Snyder  
*Are Men Really from Mars and Women from Venus? Perhaps We're All from Earth After All*
- 1995 Bolanie A. Olaniran, Grant T. Savage, and Ritch L. Sorenson  
*Teaching Computer-mediated Communication in the Classroom: Using Experimental and Experiential Methods to Maximize Learning*
- 1994 James R. McLaurin and Robert R. Taylor  
*Communication and its Predictability of Managerial Performance: A Discriminant Analysis*
- 1993 Mona J. Casady and F. Stanford Wayne  
*Employment Ads of Major United States Newspapers*
- 1992 Betty S. Johnson and Nancy J. Wilmeth  
*The Legal Implications of Correspondence Authorship*
- 1991 Rod Blackwell, Jane H. Stanford, and John D. Pettit Jr.  
*Measuring a Formal Process Model of Communication Taught in a University Business Program: An Empirical Study*

## Conference Program

### ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES

#### 2017-2018 OFFICERS

<b>President</b>	<b>Laura Lott Valenti</b> , Nicholls State University
<b>President-Elect and Program Chair</b>	<b>Kelly Grant</b> , Tulane University
<b>Secretary/Treasurer</b>	<b>Carol Wright</b> , Stephen F. Austin State University
<b>Historian</b>	<b>Kayla Sapkota</b> , University of Arkansas at Little Rock
<b>Proceedings Editor</b>	<b>Danica L. Schieber</b> Error! Bookmark not defined., Sam Houston State University
<b>Immediate Past President</b>	<b>Susan Evans Jennings</b> , Stephen F. Austin State University

#### Program and Paper Reviewers

(The best paper was chosen by a Error! Bookmark not defined.  
subset of the reviewers.)

**Traci Austin**, Sam Houston State University  
**Jon Croghan**, Northwestern State University  
**Tammy Croghan**, Northwestern State University  
**Debbie D. DuFrene**, Stephen F. Austin State University  
**Susan Jennings**, Stephen F. Austin State University  
**Margaret S. Kilcoyne**, Northwestern State University  
**Ashley Nelson**, Tulane University  
**Kayla Sapkota**, University of Arkansas at Little Rock  
**Danica Schieber**, Sam Houston State University  
**Lucia Sigmar**, Sam Houston State University  
**Laura Lott Valenti**, Nicholls State University  
**Carol Wright**, Stephen F. Austin State University

#### CONGRATULATIONS!

##### Recipient of the 2018 Federation of Business Disciplines Paper Award

*Communications Strategies for Human Resource Managers and Other Counselors: Extensions and Applications of  
Equity Theory*

**N. Lamar Reinsch**, Lubbock Christian University  
**Vicki Gates**, Georgetown University

##### Recipient of the 2018 Federation of Business Disciplines Outstanding Educator Award

**Judith L. Biss**, Lecturer  
Stephen F. Austin State University  
awarded posthumously  
Deceased, June 24, 2017

**ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION  
SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES**

**March 8, 2018 (Thursday)**

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7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

Ballroom A

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**ABC – SWUS and ABIS Joint Breakfast**

All ABC-SWUS and ABIS presenters and members are invited to enjoy a delicious breakfast

**ABC-SWUS or ABIS Association Name Badge REQUIRED for Attendance at Breakfast**

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8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Joint Session with ABIS

Ballroom A

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**ABC-SWUS and ABIS Joint Session**

Co-Session Chairs/Association Vice Presidents and Conference Chairs:

**Kelly A. Grant**, Tulane University

**Degan Kettles**, Brigham Young University

**ABC-SWUS Best Paper:** *Communications Strategies for Human Resource Managers and Other Counselors: Extensions and Applications of Equity Theory*

**N. Lamar Reinsch**, Lubbock Christian University

**Vicki Gates**, Georgetown University

**ABIS Best Paper:** *Project Management Software: Development and Evaluation of the PMIS*

**J. Christopher Zimmer**, West Texas A&M University

**Liang Chen**, West Texas A&M University

**Jermey C. Bellah**, West Texas A&M University

*Don't Bite my Bytes: A Burkeian Analysis of Corporate Responses to Data Theft in Cyberattacks*

**Tammy L. Croghan**, Northwestern State University

**Jon Michael Croghan**, Northwestern State University

**Reagan Escude**, Northwestern State University

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10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Exhibit Hall (Ballroom C)

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**FBD Coffee Break**

Please make plans to visit the exhibits for information on the latest books and newest educational technologies. Let our exhibitors know how much we appreciate their presence and continued support!

Great Door Prize Drawings take place at **10:15 a.m.** in the Exhibit Area. Must be present to win.

**ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION  
SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES**

**March 8, 2018 (Thursday)**

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

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**Communication and Career Readiness**

Session Chair: **Kayla Sapkota**, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

*Workplace Manners and Civility: Students' Perceptions and Experiences*

**Sandra H. Bevill**, Arkansas State University

**Karen McDaniel**, Arkansas State University

*The Persistent Gap: Why do Business Graduates' Soft Skills Continue to Defy Employer Expectations and How Can Business Curriculum Reshape to Make up the Difference*

**Lorelei Amanda Ortiz**, St. Edward's University

**Catherine MacDermott**, St. Edward's University

*Connecting with Companies for Experiential Learning*

**Donna Greenwald**, Bowling Green State University

*A Study on Former Dancing Stars' Transferable Skills, Career Transition Support, and New Career Satisfaction*

**Leslie Ramos Salazar**, West Texas A&M University

*Student Expectations for the Undergraduate Business Communications Course*

**Julie McDonald**, Northwestern State University

**Margaret S. Kilcoyne**, Northwestern State University

11:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

**Lunch on your own**

**ABC – SWUS Executive Board Meeting and Luncheon**

**By Invitation Only (Maya)**

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

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**Change Your Perspective; Change Your Experience - Perspectives on Communication**

Session Chair: **Ashley Hall**, Stephen F. Austin State University

*Faculty Views of Communication Issues with Students at a Traditional University*

**Eddie Horton**, Northwestern State University

*Ethical Implications of Communicating Mass School Shooting Information*

**Ashley Katherine Yuckenberg**, George Mason University

*What Communication Barriers Hinder Innovation Diffusion Within Universities?*

**Rochelle Daniel**, Bowie State University

*Leading with a Two-edged Sword: An Existentialist View of Organizational Storytelling*

**Laural Adams**, Virginia Commonwealth University

*Nonverbal Contrast in the Contemporary Egalitarian Commercials: An Analysis of Popular Indian Advertisements*

**Swatantra**, Indian Institute of Management - Indore

**ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION  
SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES**

**March 8, 2018 (Thursday)**

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3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Exhibit Hall (Ballroom C)

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**FBD Coffee Break**

Please make plans to visit the exhibits for information on the latest books and newest educational technologies. Let our exhibitors know how much we appreciate their presence and continued support!

Great Door Prize Drawings take place at **3:15 p.m.** in the Exhibit Area. Must be present to win.

**Poster Sessions- Exhibit Hall, Ballroom C**

*A Medium-Size Impact on a Huge Class with a Small Budget: Teaching Business Writing in a Required Interdisciplinary Sophomore-Year Course*

**Bonnie Auslander**, University of Colorado Boulder

**August Ridley**, University of Colorado Boulder

**Margot “Kiki” Adams**, University of Colorado Boulder

**Rachel Austerfjord**, University of Colorado Boulder

Recruiters continually press business schools to send them graduates with better writing skills, but can improved writing be taught in a huge core course with a small budget? The answer: a cautious yes. This poster paper reports on University of Colorado at Boulder’s pilot attempt to infuse business writing in a required core cross-disciplinary sophomore-year course that serves over 1,000 students a year.

*Meeting the Leadership Communication Skills of our Students*

**Carol S. Wright**, Stephen F. Austin State

**S. Ann Wilson**, Stephen F. Austin State

This exploratory study examines students’ perceptions of the communication skills most desired of leaders and whether these students feel they possess these. This study reviews the current literature on leadership communication, and present students’ perception of these required skills. Findings from this study will be used to improve courses focused on leadership and executive communication.

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3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

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**Breaking the Mold - Challenging Norms in Communication**

Session Chair: **Carol Wright**, Stephen F. Austin University

*Gamification in the College Classroom - Student Responses to Megapoint Opportunities*

**Gerald Plumlee, Jr.**, Southern Arkansas University

*Self-Regulated Learning in a Graduate Business Communications Course: A Qualitative Inquiry*

**Catherine Flynn**, Kaplan University

**Joel Olson**, Kaplan University

**Michelle Reinhardt**, Kaplan University

*Academic Persistence within Professional Communication Programs at Hispanic-Serving Institutions*

**Kenneth Robert Price**, Texas A&M University-Kingsville

*The Roles of Foreign Language in Business Administration*

**Kalu Bernard Orji**, Adeyemi College of Education Ondo

**Claudia Anne Kalil**, University of Cape Town

*Going for (the) Broke: Assembling an Open Educational Resources Textbook Equivalent for Business Communications*

**Craig Rinne**, Florida Atlantic University

**ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION  
SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES**

**March 8, 2018 (Thursday)**

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5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

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**FBD Presidential Welcome Reception**

Everyone is invited to attend this FBD conference-wide social event. Visit with long-time friends and make new ones as you enjoy light appetizers and live music. A cash bar is available and a limited number of drink tickets will also be distributed. Stop by to relax and wind down from the day's conference activities before heading out to other association and cultural events or dinner.

**ENJOY YOUR EVENING IN ALBUQUERQUE!**



**ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION  
SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES**

**March 9, 2018 (Friday)**

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8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

Ballroom B

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**ABC-SWUS and ABIS Joint Breakfast**

All ABC-SWUS and ABIS presenters and members are invited to enjoy a delicious breakfast

**ABC-SWUS or ABIS Association Name Badge REQUIRED for Attendance at Breakfast**

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8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

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**FBD/ABC-SWUS Choice Pick Session**

**Innovation and Advancement in Communication Education**

Session Chair: **Laura Valenti**, Nicholls State University

*Continuous Improvement through the Assessment Process in a Business Communication Course: A Ten-Year Journey*

**Carol S. Wright**, Stephen F. Austin State University

**Marsha Bayless**, Stephen F. Austin State University

*The Effect of Case Studies on Students' Audience Awareness*

**Danica L Schieber**, Sam Houston State University

**Vincent Robles**, University of North Texas

*The Influence of Coloring Mandalas on Students' Communication Anxiety*

**Leslie Ramos Salazar**, West Texas A&M University

*When in Doubt, Cite: Activities and Assignments for Teaching the Rules of APA*

**Marcel Marie Robles**, Eastern Kentucky University

**Billy Ackerman**, Eastern Kentucky University

*Making the Most of Limited Time: Using Focus Tools to Improve Grammar, Mechanics, and Style*

**Kathryn O'Neill**, Sam Houston State University

**Geraldine E. Hynes**, Sam Houston State University

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10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Exhibit Hall (Ballroom C)

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**FBD Coffee Break**

Please make plans to visit the exhibits for information on the latest books and newest educational technologies. Let our exhibitors know how much we appreciate their presence and continued support!

Great Door Prize Drawings take place at **10:15 a.m.** in the Exhibit Area. *Must be present to win.*

For a premier publishing opportunity, check out the peer-reviewed  
**FBD Journal** at <https://www.fbdonline.org/journal/>



*All FBD conference participants are eligible to have their work considered  
for the low submission fee of \$40.*

**ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION  
SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES**

**March 9, 2017 (Friday)**

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10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. ABC Business Meeting

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**ABC SWUS Business Meeting (all members welcome)**

Presiding: **Laura Lott Valenti**, ABC-SWUS President  
Nicholls State University

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12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. **Lunch on your own**

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1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

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**Navigating 21<sup>st</sup> Century Communication**

Session Chair: **Ashley Smith**, Sam Houston State University

*Managerial Communication and Employee Job Satisfaction during Times of Organizational Change within the Healthcare Industry*  
**Ashley Hall**, Stephen F. Austin State University

*Integrating the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Framework as a Route to Job Preparedness in the Communications Industry*  
**Kayla Sapkota**, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

*Make Room for Generation Z*  
**Debbie D. DuFrene**, Stephen F. Austin State University

*An Examination of the Effect of Collaborative Technologies on Team Development and Function*  
**Traci Austin**, Sam Houston State University  
**Lucia Sigmar**, Sam Houston State University

**ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION  
SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES**

**March 9, 2018 (Friday)**

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3:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Exhibit Hall (Ballroom C)

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**FBD Coffee Break**

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3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

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**Leading the Way with Communication**

Session Chair: **Danica Schieber**, Sam Houston State University

*Improving Perceived Career Readiness: Student Responses to Service-Learning Projects in Business Courses*

**Ashley Smith**, Sam Houston State University

**Mary Funck**, Sam Houston State University

*Downward Relational Maintenance in the Workplace*

**Kevin Sager**, University of Alaska Fairbanks

*Conflating Leadership: The Role of Age and Experience on Perceptions of Leadership*

**Jon Michael Croghan**, Northwestern State University

**Tammy L. Croghan**, Northwestern State University

**Reagan Escude**, Northwestern State University

**Dalton Boyd**, Northwestern State University

*Promoting Cross-functional Team Interactions within General Business Classes*

**Christopher McKenna**, Stephen F. Austin State University

*Thinking Visually: Students Connect Textual and Visual Resources in Business Communication*

**Lindsay Camille Clark**, Sam Houston State University

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**46<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

March 13-16, 2019

# **Communication Strategies for Human Resource Managers and Other Counselors: Extensions and Applications of Equity Theory**

**N. Lamar Reinsch**

**Vicki Gates**

Abstract: This paper extends and applies equity theory to assist Human Resource managers (and others) when they counsel distressed or disgruntled individuals. From its origins, equity theory has included a significant emphasis on human perceptions. This paper builds on that emphasis (and on the literature of nonprofessional counseling) to identify potential goals or objectives for HR managers and other counselors. The applicability of equity theory and the theory-based objectives are illustrated through discussion of a series of actual (but disguised) HR cases. The paper makes several contributions including (a) enlarging the arena in which equity theory has been applied so as to include nonprofessional counseling; (b) providing HR managers and other nonprofessional counselors with a list of goals which can provide a focus for developing appropriate strategies, and (c) demonstrating the value of equity theory to scholars who study business communication.

An organization benefits when employees (and customers and other stakeholders) regard its policies and practices as fair. As Forray notes, "To ignore fairness potentially entails costs that organizations do not wish to incur, while to act justly produces direct and indirect benefits in terms of organizational efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of life" (2006, p. 361). Arguably, the most important factors in shaping an employee's assessments of fairness are the policies that govern the workplace and the behaviors of the employee's supervisor and fellow workers. However, those factors do not reach an employee in a purely objective form. Instead, they are perceived in a process that involves employee decisions about which details to notice (or ignore), about how to interpret ambiguous signals, and about the selection of an appropriate standard of comparison. As a result, in

most workplaces, almost every employee will occasionally perceive something as unfair. That employee may turn to others for confirmation. One “other” who is frequently consulted—especially in more serious situations—is the Human Resources (HR) manager.

An HR manager confronted by a distressed employee has a serious responsibility and a sensitive task. In most cases, the HR manager’s overarching goal, while representing the organization, is to interact sympathetically with the employee in order to help the employee return to work as a productive and cooperative team member. The primary thesis of this paper is that equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1975; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973) can provide the HR manager with conceptual tools that are useful for completing the task. Furthermore, we believe that conceptual tools we develop will be useful in other nonprofessional counseling situations such as a teacher meeting with a student, a supervisor meeting with a subordinate, and a team leader meeting with a team member.

In the remainder of the paper, we will review equity theory, identify some of the communication practices available to HR managers (and other counselors) when engaged in nonprofessional counseling (Stano & Reinsch, 1982, chap. 8), discuss a series of actual (but disguised) HR cases in order to apply and clarify equity theory, and finally, draw conclusions. The contributions of our paper include the following: First, by applying equity theory to nonprofessional counseling interactions we extend the range of equity theory to an arena in which it has—somewhat surprisingly—not previously been applied. Second, in the process of applying equity theory to cases, we identify a set of communication goals (Shelby, 1991) that nonprofessional counselors can use as they develop counseling strategies. Third, our work demonstrates the potential value of equity theory to scholars studying business communication and, therefore, provides a potential foundation for future research.

## EQUITY THEORY

The development of equity theory can be traced to several prominent theorists working somewhat independently (Steers & Porter, 1975). Theories such as Cognitive Dissonance, Distributive Justice, and Equity Theory all argue that a major determinant of job performance and satisfaction is the degree of equity or inequity that an individual perceives in a work situation. “The degree of equity is defined in terms of a ratio of an individual’s inputs (such as effort) to outcomes (such as pay) *as compared* to a similar ratio for a relevant ‘other’” (Steers & Porter, 1975, pp. 135-136). It is important to note that equity theory (while related to them) is different from theories such as Cognitive Dissonance and Distributive Justice in that it “concentrates on an understanding of the *processes* by which behavior is energized and sustained” instead of “focusing on the identification of specific factors in the individual or his environment which determined behavior” (Steers & Porter, 1975 p. 136). Equity theory also stands out because it suggests “a major share of motivated behavior is based on the *perceived* situation and not necessarily on the actual set of circumstances” (Steers & Porter, 1975, p. 136). The centrality of perceptions—which are amenable to modification by communication—mark perceived inequity as a rhetorical exigency, that is, one which is “capable of positive modification” the “positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse” (Bitzer, 1968, p. 6).

Equity theory was developed in 1963 by J. Stacy Adams, a workplace and behavioral psychologist, who asserted that employees seek to maintain equity between the inputs that they bring to a job and the outcomes that they receive from it, sometimes comparing perceived inputs and outcomes against the perceived inputs and outcomes of an “other.” In a two-party scenario, one person evaluates the costs and rewards of dealing with a second person (Adams, 1975, p. 140). In a three-party scenario one person evaluates the costs (or inputs) and rewards (or outcomes) of dealing with a second person, and compares the ratio to the costs and rewards experienced by a third person who is in similar circumstances, perhaps dealing with the same second-person. The two types of scenarios are, of course, closely related. The sense of what a person regards as “fair” is

learned, and is learned in a community such as “home . . . school . . . [or] work” (Adams, 1975, p. 141); thus the basis for the purely personal assessment in a two-party scenario is based on experience in multi-party communities. The choice of perspective (two-party versus three-party) is, then, conditioned by history and culture (Buzea, 2014) or affected by situational details (e.g., how much knowledge one has about the circumstances of others and comments or inquiries received from others).

When an employee exchanges his or her services for pay, he or she will expect a fair return to what he or she contributes. Inputs are what the employees “brings” and contributes, such as, talent, education, experience, skill, seniority, effort, etc. It is important to recognize that the inputs are *perceived* by their contributor and are not necessarily the same as those perceived by the other party to the exchange (Adams, 1975). Adams also states, “If either the possessor or both members of the exchange recognizes its existence, the attribute has the potentiality of being an input” (Adams, 1975, p. 139).

The other “leg” of the exchange consists of an individual’s receipts or outcomes, which include salary, benefits, promotions, prerequisites, and intangibles, such as, recognition and prestige. In the same manner as inputs, outcomes are also perceived and should be characterized in terms of recognition and relevance (Adams, 1975). When a person perceives that his outcomes and inputs are not in balance, feelings of inequity result (Adams, 1975). Theoretically, inequity can be either unfairly small (provoking anger) or unfairly large (provoking guilt). However, neither of us recall counseling an employee experiencing guilt because of over-compensation, and this paper will focus on perceptions of inequality in which the employee feels disadvantaged.

The presence of inequity is expected to motivate the employee to achieve equity or reduce inequity, and the strength of motivation to do so will vary directly with the magnitude of inequity experienced (Adams, 1975). The employee might, for example, choose one or more of the following approaches in order to accomplish this change: altering his or her inputs (if inputs are susceptible

to modification), altering his or her outcomes (if they are susceptible to alteration), distorting his or her inputs and/or outcomes cognitively, leaving the field, forcing the person (other) with whom he or she is comparing to leave the field, or changing the object (the other person) of the comparison (Adams, 1975). From the perspective of resolving the employee's perception of inequity, it may not matter which is of these approaches is selected—any of them could, in some circumstances, do the job. But, from the perspective of the HR manager some of these options are distinctly undesirable. For example, a reduction in inputs (e.g., reduced work effort), an unauthorized increase in outcomes (e.g., workplace theft), leaving the field (e.g., resignation of a valuable employee), or attempts to stimulate others to leave the field (e.g., efforts to discomfort another employee) will damage to the organization, perhaps severely. The HR manager meeting with a dissatisfied employee is not only interested in helping the employee to resolve perceived inequity but, rather, desirous of resolving the inequity in a way that does not damage the organization and, ideally, a way that will strengthen the organization.

#### NONPROFESSIONAL COUNSELING: GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Conversing with a disgruntled subordinate or peer with the goal of being helpful is a form of nonprofessional counseling. Nonprofessional counseling has been defined as “a communicative process in which one person [the counselor] seeks, by maintaining an appropriate relationship and by communicating in certain ways, to help another person [the client] cope with his or her difficulties” (Stano & Reinsch, 1982, p. 152). This counseling is described as “nonprofessional” because the counselor is not employed as a counselor and, usually, has not been trained as a counselor (e.g., is not a psychiatrist or a clinical psychologist). Instead, he or she is an HR manager, a supervisor, a teacher, a minister, or simply a friend who is willing to try to help. Such counseling occurs frequently (Stano & Reinsch, 1982, chap. 8) and can be helpful to a client if performed prudently and skillfully (Janis, 1983; Kennedy, 1981; Kennedy & Charles, 2001).



## **Goals for HR Managers (and Other Counselors)**

The nonprofessional counselor's "tool kit" consists of a normal set of interpersonal communication practices; for example, listening, observing nonverbal behavior, asking questions, and making statements. These abilities are deployed toward helping the client resolve his or her feelings of inequity. That goal is, however, overly broad. In this section, therefore, we a set of more specific goals derived on the basis of equity theory. Specifically, we propose that an HR manager focus on one of the goals in the following list (or, depending on circumstances, a selected sub-set):

- Helping the client to achieve a perceptual change with regard to his or her inputs and/or outcomes. This could involve a review of the employment contract with attention to the "other duties as assigned" clause to show that a change in required inputs does not violate the contract. It could also involve an exploration of outcomes in a search for outcomes (e.g., mastery of new skills) that the client may have overlooked or undervalued.

- Helping the client to choose between a two-party or a three-party scenario for assessing equity. For example, an employee might (when objective circumstances support such an assertion) be counseled to note that while he or she feels inequitably treated within a two-party scenario, shifting to a three-party scenario reveals that the input/output ratio is entirely consistent with those of fellow workers. Alternately (again, when objective circumstances support the assertion), an employee might be counseled to focus on a two-party scenario because the available third-parties to which the employee has been attending have jobs so different from the client as to render comparisons invalid.

- Helping the client who adopts a three-party perspective to choose an appropriate third party. When one is aggrieved, there seems to be a (normal) tendency to search for third-party comparisons that emphasize the perceived inequity. A well-informed HR manager can, in such

instances, explain why a particular third-party is not an appropriate comparison and point the client toward a more valid comparison (while, of course, respecting the privacy of all employees).

- When perceptual shifts do not allow a client to regain perceptions of equity, helping the client to plan toward achieving appropriate changes in objective reality. Individuals who work in HR for significant periods of time are almost certain to encounter situations that call for changes beyond the perceptual. In some cases, these may result in the counselor supporting the client as he or she seeks a transfer or separation. In other cases, the HR manager may choose to consult with line managers in order to recommend a change in a client's inputs, outcomes, or both.

It is rarely, if ever, the case that an HR manager can identify an appropriate goal in advance. More commonly, an HR manager spends the first interaction with a client trying to achieve a good understanding of the issues involved and tentatively trying to identify an appropriate goal. Equity theory provides, we think, a short and useful list of appropriate goals.

### **Strategies for Nonprofessional Counselors**

The literature on nonprofessional counseling offers a number of techniques that can be marshaled toward achievement of perceived equity (Janis, 1983; Kennedy, 1981; Kennedy & Charles, 2001; Stano & Reinsch, 1982). As summarized in Figure 1, we believe that most nonprofessional counseling interactions should begin with frame setting as appropriate to the circumstances (e. g., a review of the "ground rules" that apply to meetings with an HR manager in the specific workplace). Early stages of the interaction are likely to include a certain amount of "venting" (or "emotional release") on the part of the client. The counselor should, to the extent possible, express understanding and acceptance of the client's feelings without endorsing accusations that the client may direct toward a supervisor or co-worker. This usually allows a transition into an opportunity for the counselor to ask questions that clarify the details and facts (as the client perceives them). Once the counselor has a good understanding of the client's concerns,

the counselor may begin (if not immediately then in a subsequent conversation) to implement one or more strategies (e.g., selective reassurance, education, etc.) in order to help the client move toward the desired outcome (e.g., revised perceptions of inputs and/or outcomes).

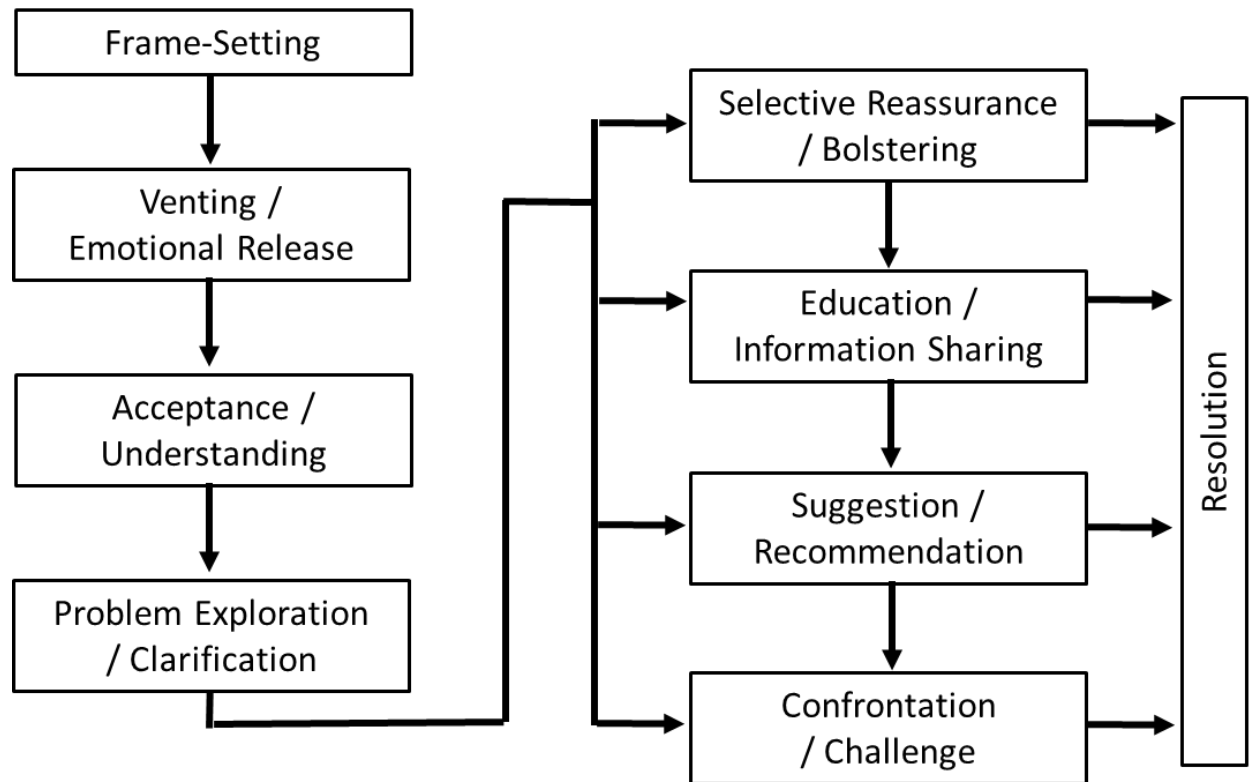


Figure 1: Strategies for the Nonprofessional Counseling Interview. After initial stages the counselor can adopt one (or more) of the strategies listed on the right-hand side of the figure (selective reassurance, education, etc.).

While Figure 1 suggests that the various strategies might be considered or even implemented in a predictable sequence, the reality is that most counseling sessions (or sequences of sessions) involve a great many stops and starts along with what would appear on Figure 1 as back-tracking. It is, in fact, likely that the counselor will find it necessary to adjust the desired goal (see previous discussion of goals for nonprofessional counselors). Changes in goals will usually entail adjustments in strategies as well.

## APPLYING CONCEPTS TO CASES

This section of the paper applies equity theory and related concepts to HR cases. All cases come from the personal recollections of the authors (who have experience in multiple organizations). All of the cases have been thoroughly disguised.

### **Case 1: More Work, Same Salary**

Andrew is upset because his supervisor, Brenda, has asked him to perform extra work (part of Brenda's assigned tasks). Brenda expects the additional demands on Andrew to be temporary– but has not communicated that information to Andrew. This case, as presented, is a simple two-party scenario. (A more detailed version of this same case will also be discussed as Case 4.)

**An equity theory interpretation.** From the perspective of Andrew, his supervisor is demanding more inputs from him without any adjustment in his outcomes. Andrew feels frustrated and, according to equity theory, may look for ways to reduce his inputs (e.g., neglecting some tasks, settling for a lower level of quality in his work) so that his inputs will match his less-than-fair outcomes. Assuming that Brenda has a legitimate reason to ask for more work from Andrew, the organization will find that one of its employees (Andrew) is trying to reduce his inputs at the very moment when the organization needs him to increase them.

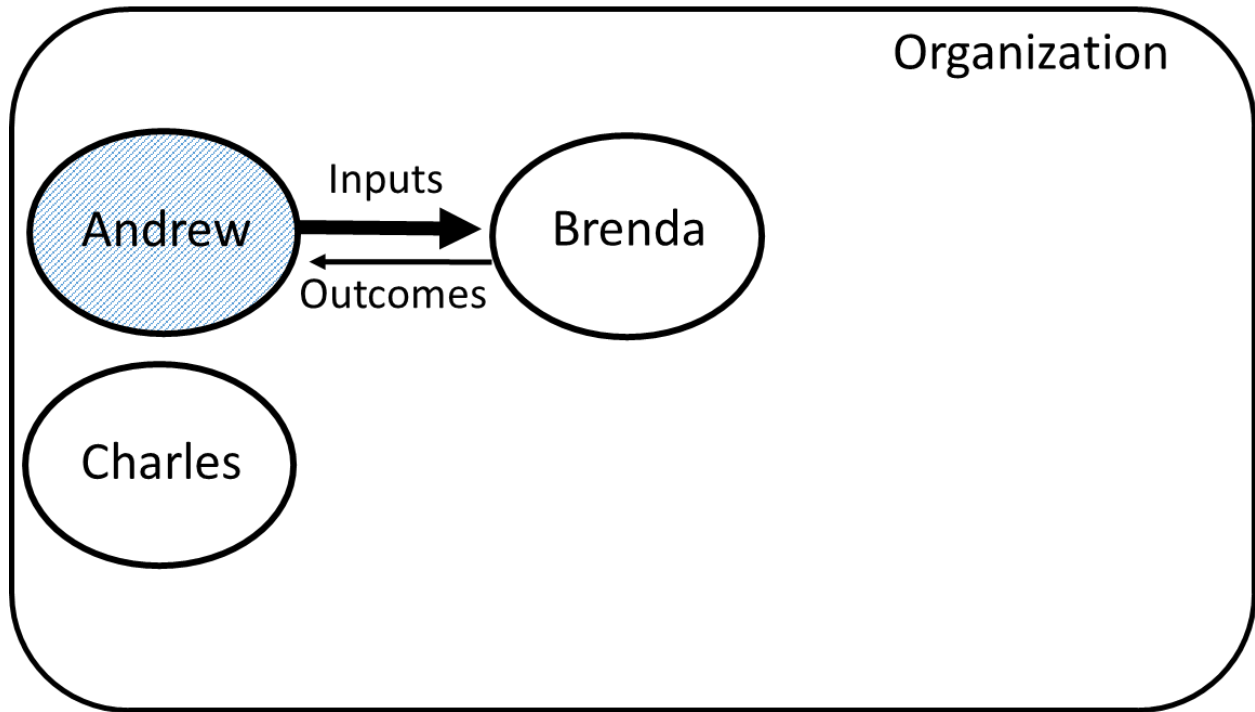


Figure 2: A two-party scenario from the perspective of Andrew. Andrew has been asked to increase inputs without a corresponding increase in Outcomes.

**Equity theory-based strategies.** The counselor has several options in this case. One possibility is to help Andrew adjust his perceptions of the situation. Andrew might, for example, be reminded that everyone's position description includes a reference to "other tasks as assigned," which means (among other things) that everyone is expected to do extra work at times and that such effort is a part of expected inputs. Andrew could be encouraged to realize that temporary increases in workload occur periodically. Also, assuming that Andrew has previously regarded Brenda as a fair supervisor, the counselor might appeal for patience by suggesting that Brenda probably has good reasons for her increased demands, reasons that will eventually be revealed.

Another potential strategy would be to explore with Andrew the possibility of previously unnoticed positive outcomes from his new duties. Is the extra work allowing him to develop new knowledge, skills, and abilities? Is he interacting with additional or different people? This approach,

of course, will help to restore Andrew's assessment of equity only if his extra work is producing outcomes that Andrew could (or perhaps, should) value positively.

A counselor could also consider the possibility of shifting from a two-party scenario to a three-party one. In some cases, for example, the counselor might be able to point out to Andrew that he was previously performing less work than another employee—Charles—who receives the same objective outcomes as he does (e.g., title and salary). In other cases, the counselor might be able to call attention to the fact that the business environment has shifted and that many employees (including some of Andrew's peers such as Charles) are being asked to re-calibrate their assessment of the appropriate inputs.

One final option would be to seek actual changes in outcomes. The counselor could, for example, approach Brenda privately and suggest the possibility of a bonus for Andrew or, perhaps, greater acknowledgment of his contributions. If (like many employees) Andrew regards recognition from his supervisor as a positive outcome, then it might be possible for Brenda to reduce Andrew's frustration by expressing her appreciation more overtly. And, while Brenda did not think it appropriate in this particular instance, in many cases the supervisor could be encouraged to inform the employee that the increased work load is only temporary and to explain why that is the case.

## **Case 2: Same Title, Different Salary**

Denise is upset because, while her position is the same grade level as that of Edward, Edward's annual salary is 12% higher than hers. The disparity in salary seems unfair and she may suspect that Edward is paid more because he is male. This case is a relatively straight-forward three-party scenario involving Denise, Edward, and their supervisor, Felicity.

**An equity theory interpretation.** From her perspective, this appears to Denise (who recently discovered the disparity in salaries) as a clear case of the organization not providing "equal pay for equal work." While she and Edward have the "same job," they do not receive the "same

pay.” She feels angry at the apparent disparity and, according to equity theory, will seek to achieve a greater sense of equity. While one option would be for her to consider reducing her inputs, it is more likely (in our experience) that Denise will seek to secure increased outcomes.

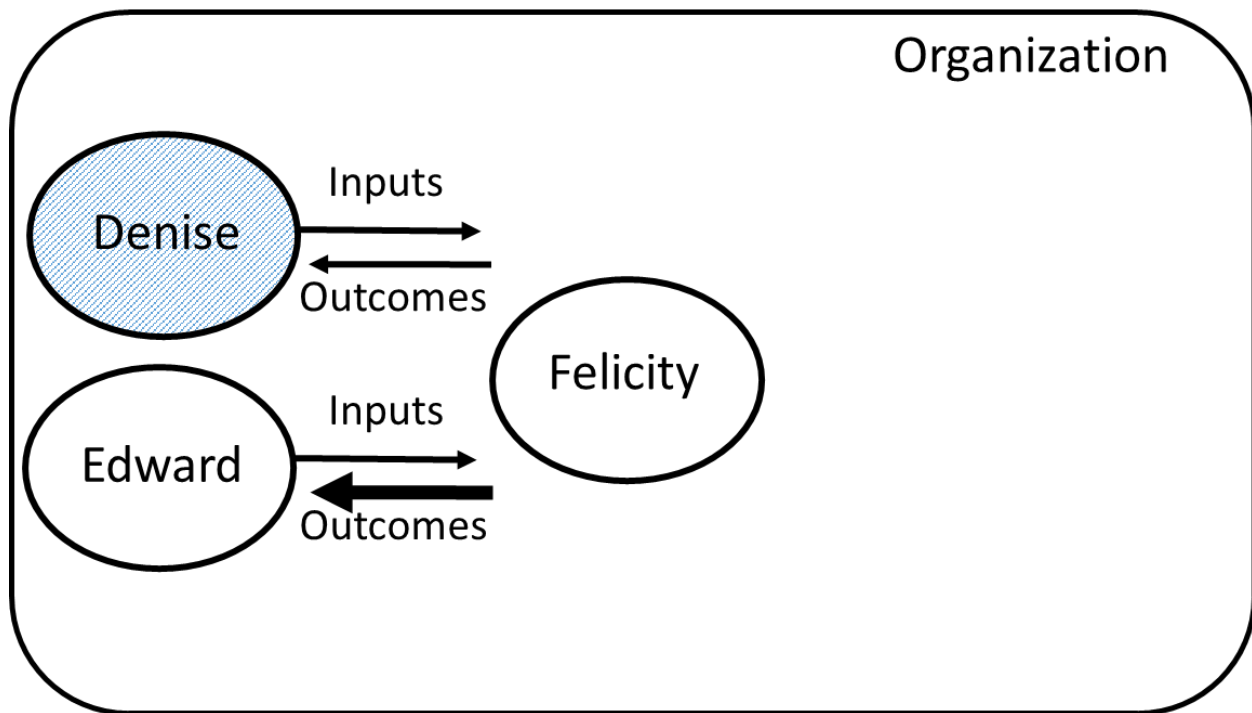


Figure 3: A three-party scenario from the perspective of Denise. Denise feels that she and Edward perform the same work. But Edward is paid more.

**Equity theory based strategies.** What Denise does not realize is that although the positions are the same in type of duties, such as program management and coordination, the scope of these duties is not the same. Denise handles smaller, low-dollar, local programs, and works from the home office. Edward, on the other hand, is expected to handle the same type of duties for programs that are more complex (e.g., clients pay more and expect more), that involve extensive (frequently international) travel, and that require strong interpersonal skills for dealing with program participants from other countries. For example, when international participants are brought to a U.S. location for training, they expect to be made welcome and to feel “at home” in (what is for them) a foreign country. In short, Edward’s position is one that requires a more diverse

skill set, a higher level of interpersonal abilities, and a willingness to be away from home for significant periods of time. In fact, the position Denise holds is a stepping stone toward the position that Edward holds. So an obvious strategy for a counselor is to spend some time educating Denise about the differences between the two positions, helping her to more accurately perceive the work that Edward does, so as to avoid simplistic comparisons based only on job title or grade level.

A discussion with Denise might, alternately, result in finding a more appropriate third-party comparison, ideally another person who works for Felicity and whose responsibilities are similar to those of Denise. In the absence of an appropriate third-party, a counselor might encourage Denise to shift to a two-party scenario (“Is the organization paying you what they agreed to pay you? Did your compensation seem fair before you discovered what Edward was making?”).

Finally, the HR manager should not overlook the possibility of a need for change in objective policies (e.g., a salary increase for Denise). Events that seem to point toward sex-based discrimination should not be quickly or lightly passed over. In this instance, for example, the HR manager might want to review selection procedures to verify that both men and women with appropriate qualifications were considered for the position now held by Edward. If the HR manager finds evidence of possible sex-based discrimination, the HR manager should (for the good of the organization) discuss the issue with appropriate corporate authorities.

### **Additional Cases**

Cases 1 and 2 provide an introduction to a two-party and three-party scenarios. In the remaining four cases, we build on that foundation to demonstrate the flexibility of equity theory for describing and assisting in a variety of other situations.

### **Case 3: Same Office, Different Cultures**



Griego feels that he is being treated unfairly and is uncertain about his options, if any. He is a recent arrival in the United States, admitted on the basis of a company-sponsored visa, and employed in the technology department. He regards his job as a good one. And he has good working relationships with his supervisor, Helen, and his peers, such as, Isaac.

However, when Isaac and other co-workers leave at five o'clock, usually on the way to "happy hour" at a nearby restaurant, Griego still has work to do and so remains at his desk. He believes that Helen assigns more work to him than to some of his co-workers. But—still operating on the basis of his home culture—Griego does not feel comfortable questioning his supervisor. As Griego grows increasingly frustrated, and Helen remains unaware of his frustration, Griego decided to contact Human Resources even though he fears the possibility of retribution.

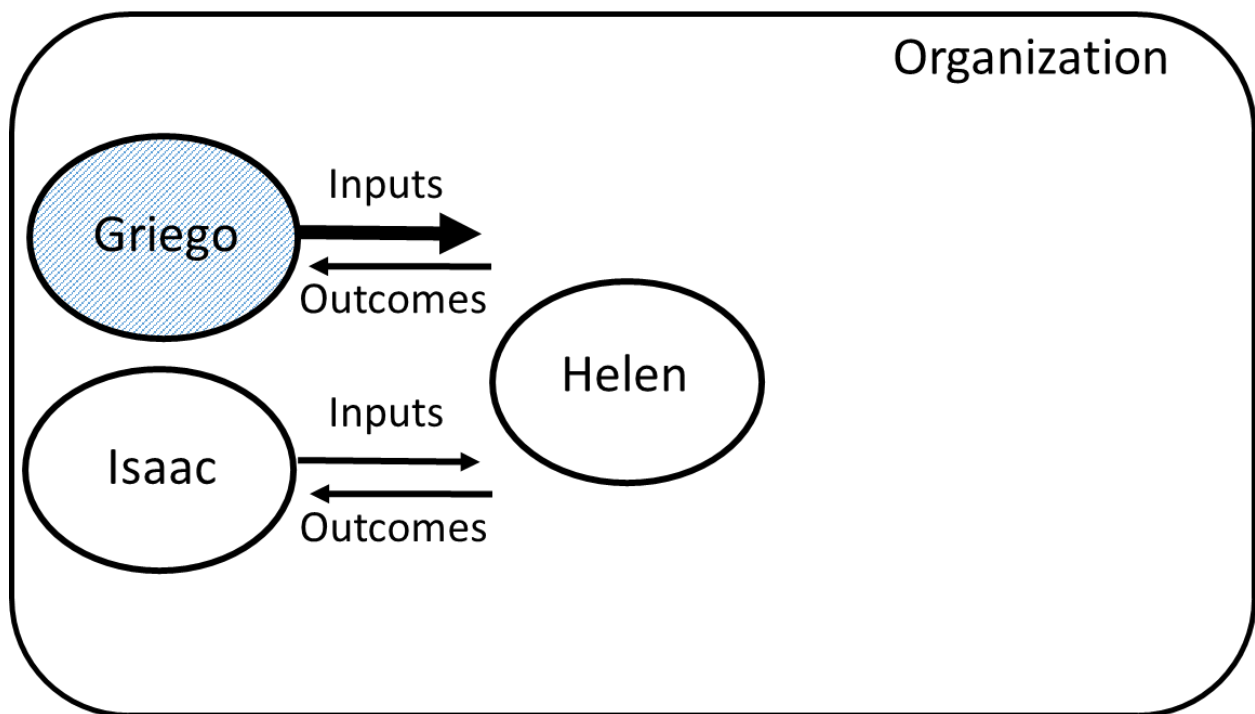


Figure 4: A three-party scenario from the perspective of Griego (a new arrival in the United States). Griego believes that he is doing more work than Isaac and the rest of Helen's subordinates.

**Equity theory interpretation.** In some ways this case is a very simple one. It is another example of straightforward three-party scenario (like Case 2). Griego perceives the ratio of his

inputs to outcomes as less advantageous than the ratio of Isaac's inputs and outcomes. However, the perceptions of inequity are confounded with cultural differences.

Because he is living and working in a foreign (to him) culture, there is a possibility that Griego is mis-perceiving Helen's instructions and mis-interpreting the actions of his co-workers. (For example, does everyone else have their work finished at five o'clock before they leave for happy hour, or do they simply leave at five whether finished or not?) Furthermore, as Griego recognizes, his "natural" (home-culture) responses might be inappropriate in the U.S.; this results in indecision, uncertainty, and increasing frustration on the part of Griego.

Finally, when Griego does speak with an HR manager (or some other counselor), he is likely to approach that interaction in a way shaped by his sense of being in a foreign culture. One of us (first author) has a great deal of experience counseling foreign-born employees and finds that they almost always describe their agenda as wishing to have a better understanding of their current compensation, perhaps because they see that as a safe topic in case a supervisor learns that they have requested a meeting. In such interactions the counselor must establish a sense of trust and, in some cases confidentiality, before employees will begin to articulate their actual concerns.

**Equity theory based strategies.** It is important, first of all, to consider whether or not equity theory is an appropriate framework for counseling with a client from another culture. Applications of equity theory in cultures as different as Peru (Burrai, Font, & Cochrane, 2015), Greece (Arvanitis & Hantz, 2016), and the Gulf states (Ryan, 2016) suggest an affirmative answer. A more detailed examination of a study conducted in Romania (Buzea, 2014) provides further support and an appropriate caution.

Buzea's study was designed to test "the cultural applicability of equity theory" in Romania, and considered all five constructs of Adams' model (inputs, outcomes, referent other, equity, and reaction to inequity). Some differences from North American work culture were noted. For example, Romanian respondents seemed reluctant to identify referent others: "This reluctance to

compare with others may be the result of a self-defending mechanism, given the large-scale inequality in Romania, related not only to income, but also to the quality of life” (Buzea, 2014, p. 434). Overall, however, Buzea’s conclusion was that equity theory could be used—and here is the cautionary comment—if “tailored to national work values and work culture” (2014, p. 435).

Therefore, when counseling a person from a non-U.S. culture, an HR manager should work to create and maintain a relationship of trust and a relationship of open communication in order to reduce misunderstandings and mis-perceptions. In almost all cases, the HR manager should also encourage trust and open communication between the client and his or her supervisor (i.e., Griego and Helen). Personal experience (again from the first author) indicates that in most cases, speaking directly to the supervisor will likely reveal that the supervisor was unaware of the employee’s concerns and willing or even eager to discuss those concerns with the employee.

Beyond, those steps, the counselor may function primarily as an educator in the sense of helping the client to better understand how workers in the local culture assess inputs, outcomes, equity, et cetera.

#### **Case 4 (Case 1-B): Stolen Inputs**

We have previously discussed a two-party scenario involving Andrew and his supervisor Brenda (Case 1). We now return to that case in order to consider additional dimensions. In addition to his previously-described concerns, Andrew expressed apprehension that Brenda was taking credit for his work with her boss.

**An equity theory interpretation.** In addition to what was previously discussed, Andrew was also thinking in terms of a three-party scenario. Andrew was estimating Brenda’s inputs and outcomes as he believed they would appear to Brenda’s boss, and assessing the ratio of inputs to outcomes as unfair because he believed Brenda was presenting Andrew’s work as her own. The supposedly unfair ratio between Brenda and her supervisor (with Brenda receiving credit for

Andrew's work) made the apparently unfair ratio (in favor of Brenda) between Andrew and Brenda even more discomforting. Andrew's concerns reveal a three-party scenario, but one that differs from that described by Adams (1963, 1975). Andrew's perceptions both confirm that employees use the equity concept to assess their circumstances, and reveal that employees apply equity concepts in sophisticated multi-party scenarios.

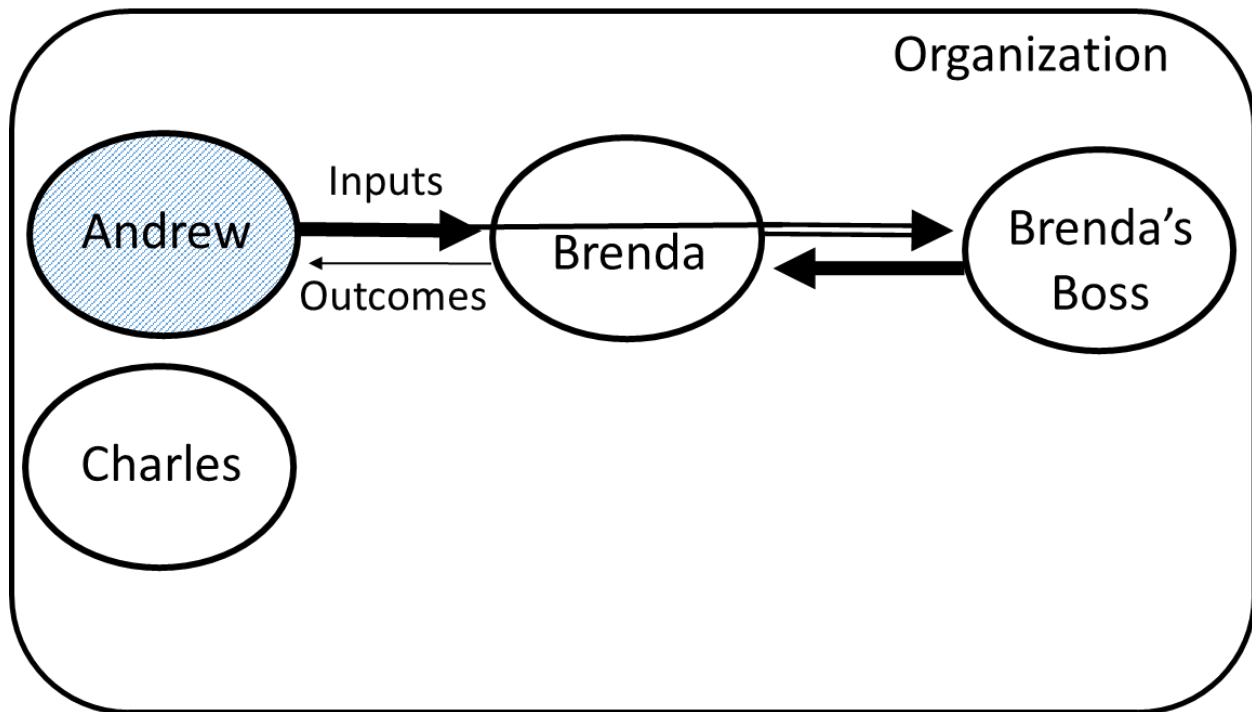


Figure 5: A three-party scenario from the perspective of Andrew. In addition to doing extra work without increased rewards (see Figure 2), Andrew fears that Brenda is taking credit (with her boss) for Andrew's work.

Viewing the case in this more complete way reveals additional dangers to the organization. Besides a desire to secure a more favorable ratio in his relationship with Brenda (Case 1), Andrew's understanding of the situation raises questions about the personal integrity of Brenda. The skillful HR manager must deal not only with the problem being presented ("my extra work is not being rewarded") but take care to protect the organization and its managers against inaccurate suspicions ("my boss is stealing credit from me").

**Equity theory based strategies.** Essentially, the counselor still has available all the options discussed in Case 1, so long as those options are implemented with an eye to defending Brenda's managerial integrity. That is, the counselor might discuss with Andrew the organizational reality of performing "other duties as assigned" when necessary, encourage Andrew to consider previously overlooked benefits from his new duties, introduce a relevant and helpful comparison (e.g., Charles), or approach Brenda to suggest additional recognition or rewards for Andrew. But all of these steps should be undertaken with an eye to how they might affect Andrew's views of Brenda. The counselor should recognize that Brenda's personal integrity is one of Andrew's concerns and—to the extent that knowledge and experience allows—express confidence in the fundamental fairness of organizational managers and of Brenda in particular.

This case also illustrates how valuable it can be for an HR manager to be well-informed about hidden aspects of the workplace and skillful in sharing (or not sharing) that information. In the actual incident (which is presented in disguised form in Case 1 and in Case 4), an upper-level position in the department had come open, Brenda's boss was not (because of internal "political" considerations) able to fill the vacancy promptly, and Brenda's boss had asked Brenda to perform that job in addition to her regular duties. Brenda had, in turn, asked Andrew to take on some of Brenda's normal work, but without explaining the situation to Andrew.

So, in addition to the previously discussed options, a counselor might wish to approach Brenda and to suggest a more complete sharing of information with Andrew, either in detail (see previous paragraph) or in a more limited way (e.g., "Andrew my boss has given me an extra assignment. This is temporary. But while it lasts, I need to ask you to do some of my work. I have explained the arrangement—what you are doing—to my boss. I will not be able to provide more details until the assignment is finished.") In some cases, the person in Brenda's role may judge it inappropriate to share such information. If so, the counselor should be careful to follow Brenda's wishes.

Alternately, without any additional disclosure of information, Brenda could make a point of allowing Andrew to see that her boss is aware of Andrew's extra work. One of us, for example, was once invited into a high-level meeting in order to make a presentation on behalf of a supervisor, which made everyone present aware of who had actually done the work. Such actions may not produce an immediate perception of equity between inputs and outcomes—but they certainly address the fear that one's extra inputs are unknown to higher-ups; and making higher-ups aware of one's "extra" contributions suggests the possibility of enhanced Outcomes at some point in the future.

#### **Case 5: Freedom to Treat Others Badly**

Jack is upset by the way in which he is treated by Karen, who is widely perceived by her peers as very hard to work with (because of manipulation and "game playing"). Karen appears to have a strong, performance-based relationship with her supervisor, a relatively senior manager named Larry. Larry, in turn, is at least partially aware of how Karen is perceived by others but continues to tolerate her workplace behavior.

**An equity theory interpretation.** This case introduces two complexities. One complexity is that what seems, at first, to be a two-person scenario involving Jack and Karen is perceived by Jack and others as a multi-party scenario, and one that (like Case 4) expands Adams' (1963, 1975) original descriptions. Jack's perception of the situation assigns a major role to Larry as Karen's enabler. In the opinion of Jack, Karen maintains a somewhat inequitable working relationship with Larry (in Larry's favor) which provides her with the job security that allows her to be an irritant to everyone else. More specifically, Karen is particularly effective at certain technical tasks (that others—including Larry—prefer to avoid). And, because she is aware of her value to Larry, Karen feels secure in her position and has no incentive to try to get along with others. Karen's subordinates and peers (including Jack), in turn, regularly show their frustration by yelling, crying,

and/or circulating emails that describe the most recent unpleasant encounter with Karen. It is interesting to note that Jack's interpretation of the situation is directly consistent with the argument of Arvanitis and Hantzi (2016) that persons use input/outcome ratios not only to assess equity but also to impute causality.

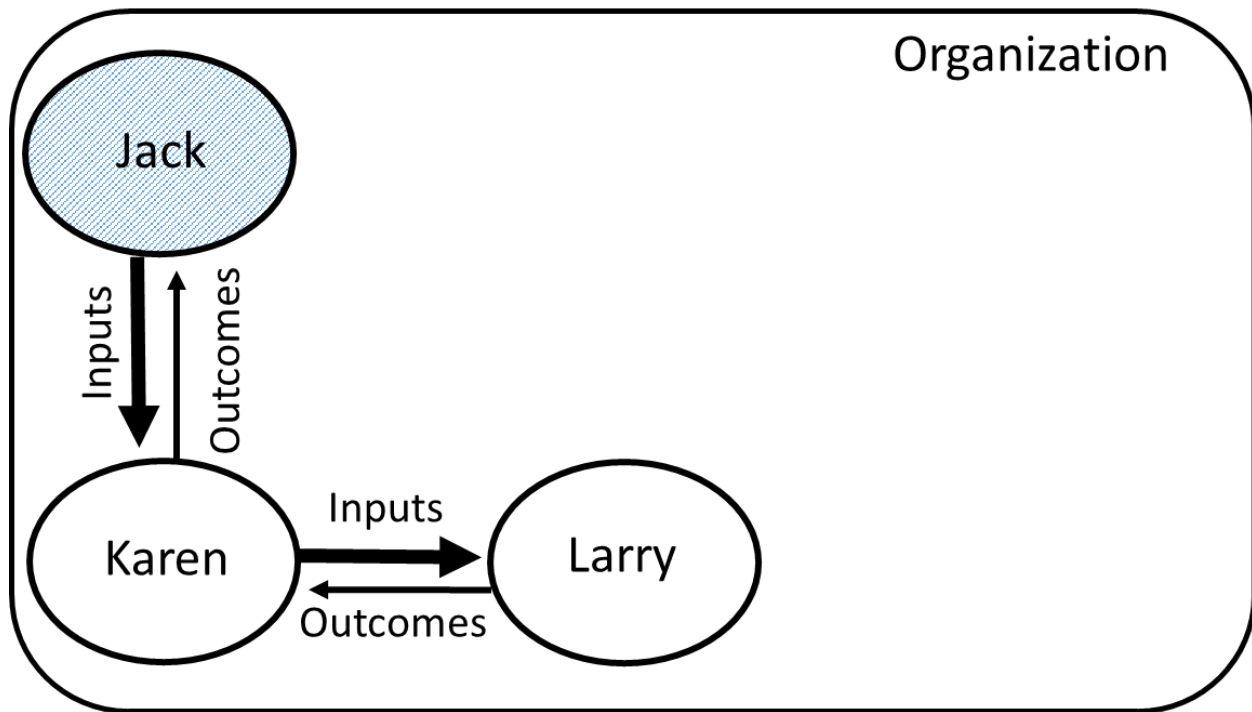


Figure 6: A three-party scenario from the perspective of Jack. Jack regards his interaction with Karen as inequitable (a deficiency in interactional justice). He believes that Karen is allowed to treat him (and others) badly because she performs work that has special value to her supervisor, Larry.

A second complication is that the case includes a newly recognized dimension on which equity can be assessed, that is, *interactional* equity. As organizational justice has become an increasingly popular topic over the past two decades, researchers have conceptualized and studied three different types of justice: *distributive*, *procedural*, and *interactional* (Westerman & Westerman, 2013). Briefly defined, distributive justice is concerned with inputs and outcomes, procedural justice is concerned with the procedures used to allocate outcomes, and interactional justice concerns interpersonal treatment (Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005; Westerman

& Westerman, 2013). More formally, interactional justice may be defined as “how fairly treated one feels during an interpersonal interaction” (Westerman & Westerman, 2013, p. 192). Research concerning interactional justice indicates that it has two dimensions: informational justice (truthfulness and willingness to explain) and interpersonal justice (respect and propriety) (Colquitt et al., 2005).

At the time Adams developed equity theory, treatments of workplace justice focused on what we today describe as distributive justice. However, the more recent studies of procedural and interactional justice indicate that they too are important because, as illustrated by this case, individuals draw on procedural and interactional experiences to assess equity. Jack (and others) know that on a few occasions Larry has “written up” Karen for some of her most egregious offenses. However, there is no evidence that Larry is prepared to replace Karen or to insist that she change her behavior. Employees who attempt to deal with Karen in a professional way feel as though they are taken advantage of and expected to be the “bigger” person when things go awry, while Karen get a pass for being “crazy.” It is apparent, in Jack’s view, that Karen is “working the system” by delivering key outcomes to her supervisor while creating interpersonal problems and a negative work culture within the organization. What Karen’s critics describe as “game playing” is a failure of informational justice (failure to be truthful and to share information); what they describe as her being “manipulative” is a failure of interpersonal justice (respectful treatment of other people).

**Equity theory based strategies.** In our experience, cases like this one are damaging to an organization (e.g., Pearson & Porath, 2009), and they can be extremely difficult to resolve, partially because interactional equity is more purely subjective than perceptions of distributive and procedural issues (which are rooted in policies and behaviors that are frequently objective and publicly available). Also, whether or not Jack is correct about the motivations behind Karen’s and Larry’s behavior, he is correct that an employee who delivers valuable results to his or her supervisor is likely to be secure in employment. Manipulative and bullying (but otherwise effective)



employees like Karen provide some of the most difficult workplace challenges. In some instances the most that a counselor can do is to listen sympathetically, acknowledge the validity of the client's concerns, and remind that the client that, unfortunately, these types of individuals will always be in the workplace. Such sympathetic listening provides a form of interactional outcome to the client and that may help to provide the client with a sense of equity.

Another useful technique is to engage in reassurance and bolstering by, for example, engaging in conversation that "selectively reinforces the *psychological defenses*" of the client (Kennedy, 1981, p. 9). Guided discussion, sympathetic listening, and selective encouragement can, for example, help a client to become more self-aware of his or her task competence and cordial, professional relationships with co-workers (other than Karen). Such awareness can help a client like Jack to control "the *anxiety* that flows from the *threat* perceived in events that contradict or challenge one's *self-image*, or accepted idea of oneself" that can arise when interacting with someone like Karen (Kennedy, 1981, p. 9). In other words, being (accurately) reassured that he performs his work competently and being (accurately) reminded of the esteem in which he is held by co-workers can help Jack to manage his feelings and reactions when he feels mistreated by Karen.

At least two changes in objective behavior may also be worthy of consideration. One possibility would be for Jack to change his own behavior. This could involve seeking a different position, avoiding interactions with Karen, or modifying his behavior so that she has less basis for complaint or attack. Such changes could have the effect of reducing Jack's personal experience of interactional equity. Another possibility would be to try to secure a change in Karen's behavior. The counselor might, for example, privately approach Larry in order to make sure that he is fully informed about Karen's impact on other employees and to seek his intervention to the extent of insisting that Karen participate in an appropriate training program.

### Case 6: More Seniority, No Promotion

Martha's job is at the same grade level as several others, including Ophelia. But, while Martha is the most experienced person in the job, Ophelia (both younger and less experienced) has been selected to receive a promotion and pay increase. To Martha, this seems to be a straightforward example of greater rewards going to someone who offers fewer inputs.

**An equity theory interpretation.** This case illustrates the importance of an HR manager (or other counselor) being well-informed about work performance and supervisor perceptions. In this instance the case is best understood as differing perceptions and valuations—by Martha and Nelson—of employee inputs.

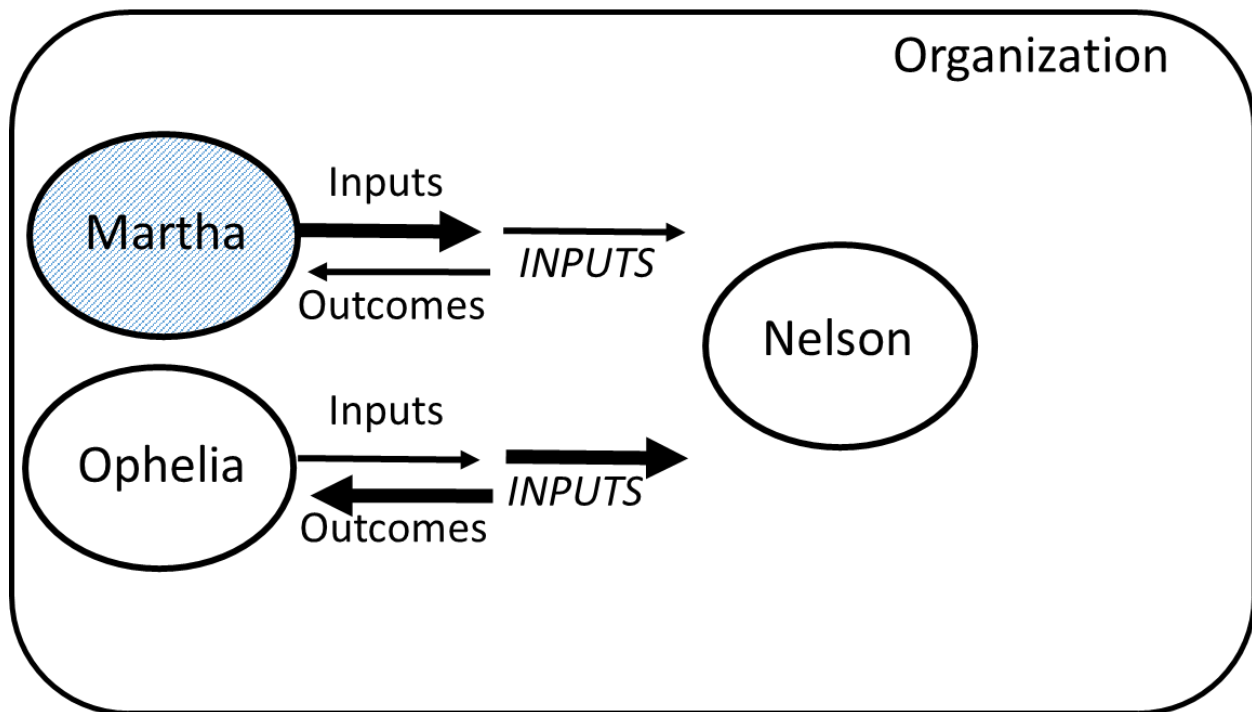


Figure 7: A three-party scenario as reported by Martha (and Nelson). Martha believes she has more to offer than does Ophelia because of her greater seniority (Inputs), but Nelson has chosen to promote Ophelia instead. Nelson's rationale is that he does not regard seniority as a valuable input (at least with regard to promotions) and perceives Ophelia as having greater potential (INPUTS).

Martha regards her additional (in comparison to Ophelia) years of work experience and tenure with the organization as valuable inputs. Nelson, on the other hand, does not regard

experience and tenure as particularly important inputs with regard to receiving a promotion. He sees Martha as “rigid” and “rough around the edges” while he sees Ophelia as flexible, resilient, and interpersonally skillful. Nelson also knows that Martha was regarded by her previous supervisor as “hard to work with” while that supervisor found Ophelia to be “easy to work with.” In sum, and unbeknownst to Martha, she almost certainly does not have a promotion in her future at this organization.

**Equity theory based strategies.** In this instance a counselor would be well-advised to begin by attempting to change perceptions and then, if necessary, encouraging an objective change. For example, the perceptual-change strategy with the greatest likelihood of success would appear to be educating Martha about Nelson’s views (and the organization’s views) concerning inputs relevant to promotion. (It is probably best that the counselor not disclose Nelson’s views of Martha’s “rough edges,” unless job appraisal data available to the counselor (or volunteered by Martha) allow that issue to be discussed explicitly. There is a possibility that discussion of “what inputs are relevant to promotions” and/or of “how have your supervisors perceived your inputs” could lead to Martha being enrolled in training with the potential of “polishing” her “rough edges.” At a minimum such a discussion should disabuse Martha of the idea that time-in-rank is regarded as an important input (with regard to promotion) by this organization.

Other perceptual strategies might be developed to help Martha better appreciate her current outcomes. A more realistic assessment of her inputs (as perceived in this organization) and the identification of some previously overlooked outcomes could provide Martha with a restored sense of equity.

But a better understanding of her personal strengths and weaknesses (inputs), additional training, or efforts to enhance perceived outcomes may not eliminate Martha’s sense of inequity. In that case, it may be time for Martha to consider separation from the organization. It is possible that a different organization would perceive and value Martha’s inputs more positively. And there is a

risk that Martha—if she feels inequitably treated—will begin to withhold inputs or engage in other activities that damage the organization. In general, an HR manager should be cautious about suggesting separation. (The process of filling an empty position is both expensive and time consuming.) However, there will be times when both an employee and an organization would benefit from such a decision (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).

### **The Usefulness of Equity Theory**

These six cases do not, of course, exhaust the list of ways in which employees may perceive themselves as treated inequitably. They do, however, illustrate the power of equity theory to provide useful understandings of why an employee is dissatisfied, and some starting points with regard to goals to be pursued during counseling.

## **CONCLUSION**

The paper makes several contributions. First, we have demonstrated the relevance of equity theory for nonprofessional counseling sessions conducted by HR managers. While equity theory has frequently been acknowledged as a useful theory for the field of Human Resources (e.g, Boxall, 2012; Herriot, Hirsh, & Reilly, chap. 9), it is typically applied in the context of distributive or procedural justice and to objective features of the workplace, such as, wages and formal policies (e.g., Jain, Horwitz, & Wilkin, 2012; Ryan, 2016). But equity theory explicitly concerns human perception which makes it possible—or even, we would argue, highly appropriate—to apply equity theory to nonprofessional counseling sessions. Forray (2006) has noted the role of human interpretation in creating and sustaining justice in the workplace. Our contribution is to focus on nonprofessional counseling as a communicative encounter and to propose equity theory as a strategic tool for identifying rhetorical strategies for HR managers. We have developed that claim by discussing a series of increasingly challenging HR cases noting both that client complaints can be

understood in terms of equity theory concepts, and that equity theory provides a useful set of conceptual tools for the counselor.

Second, we have articulated a set of equity theory-based goals (i.e., adjust perceptions of inputs and/or outcomes, move from a two-party scenario to a three-party scenario or vice versa, choose a different “third part” or comparative standard, attempt to achieve a change in objective reality). These can be used by HR managers as they seek to help distressed or disgruntled employees and, we think, also used or adapted for nonprofessional counseling in other contexts as well. We also believe that equity theory—as we have delineated it—could provide the basis for training HR managers.

Tehrani (2010) has noted both the risks and the potential personal growth that come from seeking to help distressed persons. She also found that HR advisors were at greater risk and experienced less personal growth than the other groups (i.e., occupational health advisors, counsellors, and family liaison officers) included in her British study. She described the main implication of her results as pointing to “the importance of providing the caring professional with opportunities for formal and informal reflection on their work,” including “education, learning and development” (Tehrani, 2010, p. 137). We have been unable to locate comparable data for the United States. But our experience suggests that HR managers (like their British counterparts) would benefit from more opportunities to learn relevant theories and techniques. We believe that HR managers would benefit significantly from greater acquaintance with the literature on nonprofessional counseling (e.g., Janis, 1983; Kennedy, 1981; Kennedy & Charles, 2001; Stano & Reinsch, 1983) which can provide a large number of useful communication strategies and techniques. Equity theory can supplement those techniques by helping to identify strategic goals (Shelby, 1991). As DeNisi, Wilson, and Biteman (2014) have noted, HRM research has diverged markedly from HRM practice in recent decades. Equity theory, as applied to nonprofessional counseling sessions, provides an opportunity to re-connect theory and practice.

Third, we believe our work demonstrates the value of equity theory for understanding workplace persuasion. For example, Shelby's (1986, 1988, 1991) efforts to articulate a comprehensive approach to workplace persuasion noted the relevance of the underlying concept of consistency (i.e., notions such as consistency and balance; 1986, pp. 16-18), though it did not include equity theory. Shelby's work also demonstrated the bedrock importance of perception in the process of workplace communication (1986, pp. 18-20, *passim*). However, despite the apparent compatibility of equity theory with the concerns of business communication scholars, those scholars have, for the most part, overlooked equity theory. The few exceptions include the work of Timm (1978) and, less directly, Wanguri (1996). We hope our work can stimulate further attention to equity theory by scholars who study workplace communication. Business communication scholars have tended to emphasize written texts and oral presentations. We urge business communication scholars to widen their focus and to consider the subtle, emergent, interactional persuasion of an HR manager conducting a nonprofessional counseling interview.

The HR manager's role is significant in promoting fairness and justice for all employees. Equity theory is a potentially powerful tool because it directly addresses issues of fairness and because, as we have shown, it can be readily applied to the nonprofessional counseling session. While written policies are meant to be fair, and typically are, it is the interpretation of these policies by employees that produces either a sense of equity and justice or of inequity and unfairness. Given the constant changes in most workforces, and the almost ever-present possibility of mistakes and misunderstandings, both a better understanding of equity theory and greater use of equity theory are highly desirable. Business communication scholars can contribute through their research. HR managers can contribute by using equity theory in their day-to-day work. Fairness should be diligently pursued, and strategies for achieving fairness should be created and improved—this is especially important when situations are complex and answers solutions are not immediately apparent. Equity theory can help.

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# **Communication Barriers to Innovation Diffusion in the Context of E-technology Within Universities: A Synthesis of Case Studies**

**Rochelle R. Daniel**

Abstract: The purpose of this Rapid Evidence Assessment study was to examine communication problems that hinder innovation in universities. One of the challenges managers face today in universities is managing the implementation of innovations in their organizations. Due to rapid technological advances, often innovations take the form of electronic communication. Nevertheless, it is likely that opponents and barriers will appear and hinder implementation of the innovation. Managers must not ignore the resistance to an innovation such as communication problems that can hinder innovation. Ten case studies were examined, using the lens of Rogers' diffusion of innovations and Moore's chasm, to answer the research question, what are communication problems that act as barriers to hinder innovation diffusion in universities? Based on the findings, the conclusion of this study is that four themes of communication barriers were found to hinder innovation in universities: They include channels or messages perceived untrustworthy, the absence of information or support for technology training, unclear guidelines, and the absence of interpersonal communication.

One of the many challenges for managers in today's universities is managing the implementation of innovations in their organizations. Due to rapid technological advances, often innovations take the form of electronic communication to enhance teaching and learning. During the change process, it is likely that opponents and barriers will appear and hinder implementation of the innovation, a new "idea, practice or object" to be adopted among a social system (Rogers, 1983). Managers must not ignore the resistance to an innovation because it obstructs progress (Husig & Mann, 2010, p. 182). Instead, they must strive to successfully facilitate the change process, so they can sustain

innovation throughout their institutions (Husiq & Mann, 2010, p. 180-181) to compete in an ever increasing technological society.

This study focuses on communication problems that act as barriers for hindering innovation among potential adopters in universities. It was determined while searching for literature on this topic, there is a lack of research for which the specific purpose was to examine problems related to communicating about innovations in universities. For example, there were no results from a search in the University of Maryland University College library database using the OneSearch tool and ABI database and the words “communication problems” and “innovation” and “university” in abstracts. However, there were nearly 40,000 results when “university” was removed from the search. Therefore, this study fills a research gap in scholarly literature about this topic as it relates to university settings.

### **Diffusion of Innovations**

Rogers (1962), who developed the diffusion of innovations model, argues diffusion is a special type of communication which involves four elements: (1) innovation, (2) communication, (3) time, and (4) social system (1983, p. 10). It involves a process through which messages about an innovation are communicated via specific channels over time among a social system (p. 10). People in a social system, such as an organization, “develop and share information” about the innovation. Those who have used the innovation may serve as influencers, also known as opinion leaders, champions, and change agents (Lundblad, 2003). Communication channels include mass media which are appropriate for communicating “knowledge” about innovations, and interpersonal networks, most effective for “forming attitudes and influencing adoption decisions” (Rogers, 2002, p. 990). Rogers’ (1983) diffusion model specifies five categories of adopters based on their rate of adoption and distribution: (a) innovators (2.5 percent); early adopters (13.5 percent); early majority (34 percent); late majority (34 percent); and laggards (16 percent) (p. 247).

In order to identify or prevent communication problems that hinder innovation in organizations, managers need to understand how communication about an innovation may impact the rate of adoption. For the purpose of this study, hinder is defined as to delay, prevent, and make difficult (Merriam Webster, 2016). Therefore, the first claim to be argued in this paper is the following:

**Claim 1.** Managers need to identify potential communication problems to innovation diffusion.

### **Electronic Communication**

Much of the scholarly literature on the diffusion and adoption of innovations in universities focuses on information and communication technology (ICT), also known as electronic communication. ICTs are commonly used throughout society, including government, business and most industries. It has changed how workers in organizations communicate, and perform their responsibilities as well as how managers implement practices and procedures. ICTs play an important role in organizations particularly as they manage the innovation process. In higher education institutions, ICTs are increasingly used as a tool to enhance learning and teaching. Betts (2003) and Cox (2000) noted that in education ICTs are used to re-structure the practice of teaching, prepare students for an advanced technological society, improve student learning outcomes and the quality of education (as cited in Alemu, 2015). Akbulut (2007) and Kozma (2008) acknowledged that ICTs can be used to conduct research and solve problems, as well as a creative, teaching and learning tool. Despite the potential benefits of ICTs in the education environment, the integration of the technology in these organizations has lagged behind that of other organizations (Alemu, p. 170).

### **Theoretical Lens--Moore's Chasm**

Moore (1991) builds on Rogers' diffusion of innovations model by arguing there is sometimes a chasm, a major divide between the early adopters and the early majority, during the diffusion process (p.15). Although there is a minor slowdown in adoption between the other groups of

adopters, the chasm is more difficult for diffusion. A key reason is both groups of adopters have different expectations for the innovation. The early adopters expect the innovation to be radically different from what they are used to, and the early majority do not want to disrupt what they are used to but they want improvement (p. 15). Because of their differences, Moore argues early adopters do not make suitable references for the early majority, who need such references before they can decide whether to adopt (p. 15). Therefore, organizations need to be alert to this slowdown in the diffusion process when the early majority rejects, ignores or does not readily accept the innovation. The second claim to be argued in this paper is as follows:

**Claim 2.** Since the idea of diffusion is to keep the process moving through each stage of adoption, when a chasm occurs, it jeopardizes implementation of the innovation for an organization.

Moore (1995) updated his theory to discuss what happens after “crossing the chasm”. He described the first part of the early majority as the bowling alley, when an organization should move from niche to niche (knocking over pins!) to increase adoption. If the organization is successful in offering a product which encompasses a series of niches, it may result in a tornado—this is when mass adoption takes place. Once the tornado happens, there is high demand and unfortunately the organization ignores the customer to sustain success but after the tornado, the organization returns to main street (described also as the period before the tornado). During this stage, the organization should correct their mistakes by learning from the process, and demonstrate the value of the product and how it can meet the customers’ needs (Daniel, 1996, p. 96). Organizations planning to implement an innovation may choose to incorporate the learning process before actually implementing the innovation. This leads to the third, and final claim to be argued in this paper:

**Claim 3.** Managers in universities should seek to better understand the needs of students, faculty, and staff before the adoption of an innovation begins in an effort to avoid or overcome communication barriers that hinder adoption.

In addition to filling a gap in the research on communication problems related to innovations in universities, this study informs managerial practice about these problems during the innovation process. It also adds to the scholarship on the diffusion of innovations, primarily ICTs, in universities because Rogers' diffusion model and Moore's chasm were used to synthesize 10 case studies to answer the research question, what are communication problems that act as barriers to innovation diffusion in universities? The following sections include the method, results, and discussion encompassing a narrative, conceptual framework, scholarly and practical implications of the research, conclusion, limitations and suggestions for future research.

## **Method**

The method for this study is a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), a review of scholarly literature which is conducted in a limited timeframe and can serve to inform a more comprehensive, systematic review (Gough, Oliver, & Thomas, 2012, p. 39). Systematic reviews are designed to provide evidence based research for management practitioners and policymakers to inform decision-making (p. 19), but in some cases, REAs may be more appropriate because of limited resources, time, and the purpose (p. 39). The purpose of this study was to identify 10 case studies, which focused on the diffusion of innovation in universities, and that also included findings related to communication about the innovation.

## **Search Process**

A search was conducted in the University of Maryland University College library databases using the One Search tool. Two searches were conducted and both were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2005-2017. The first search included the key words "case study" and "university" and "communication" with no subject field selected; and technology or electronic communication with no subject field selected; and adoption or diffusion or innovation with no subject field selected. The search resulted in 682 after duplicates were removed. Fifteen articles were selected based upon reviewing the abstracts to determine relevancy to the topic, and the

remaining articles were excluded for lack of relevancy. The second search included the key words “case study” and “university” and “communication” with no subject field selected; and “e-learning” or “e-teaching” or “online learning” with no field

selected. This search produced 771 articles after duplicates were removed. Based on a review of the abstracts, five articles were selected and the remaining articles were excluded because they were deemed not as relevant. A total of 20 articles from the two searches were further examined to determine if communication barriers were discussed. Eight articles were selected to review from the two searches and two articles that were obtained for a previous project were reviewed and assessed for quality.

### **Quality Assessment**

The quality of each of the 10 articles was based on the Weight of Evidence (WOE) Framework (see Appendix B). The framework includes three dimensions to assess the quality of articles for a research study: (a) soundness of studies, (b) appropriateness of study design for answering the review question, and (c) relevance of the study focus to the review (Gough et al., 2012, p. 160-162). The overall appraisal for each article is calculated in the last column. Each of the 10 studies were appraised at a value over 50 percent, which was the cutoff value for inclusion in the synthesis.

### **Results**

Each of the articles reviewed for this study was analyzed using the diffusion of innovations model and Moore’s chasm. The framework was used to determine the communication barriers that were found to hinder adoption of innovation or that may have contributed to hindering the adoption. The elements of the diffusion process that were evident in the studies included the following: (a) innovations (strategic planning initiative, a crisis, and technology to support online teaching); (b) communication (email, email policies, early adopters’ video presentations, face-to-face meetings, world wide web, informal communication); (c) time

(ranged from one month to five years); and (d) social process (the university environment which included faculty and students or faculty, students and staff).

### **Strategic Planning Initiative**

The distribution of messages via electronic communication was examined during a strategic planning initiative at a southern four-year university, which lasted about two years, (Hill, 2007).

The author found that the distribution of more than 1,300 emails to update the university community about the initiative resulted in information overload, and, thus, was deemed not effective (p. 10). Stakeholders described as “core participants” read the emails, those “not as strongly committed” read some of the messages while many “non-participants” never read any of the messages (p. 13). These findings suggest a chasm between those who were interested in the communication, the innovators and early adopters, and those who could be characterized as the early majority and later adopters. The distribution of so many emails to the entire university community resulted in a communication barrier because many stakeholders ignored the information. The findings in this study were based on observations during strategic planning meetings and interviews with the committee chairman, planning leaders, administrators, faculty, staff, and students (p. 10).

### **Email Policy**

Employee attitudes about what was important as it related to email policies was the focus of a study (Hacker, Townley, & Horton, 1998) at a university library in the southwestern part of the United States. Library administrators planned to use the study findings to determine whether to develop a policy for email use (p. 431). The study encompassed focus groups, interviews and a questionnaire to gather data from 80 library employees (pp. 430-432). The authors concluded the employees preferred guidelines and not restrictive policies that would inhibit their communication and perceived the following as problems with email: (a) lack of knowledge or training concerning the technology; (b) lack of certainty about privacy of their email



communication; (c) their right to use email for personal communication; and (d) lack of full endorsement by the administration in terms of “training, access to facilities, and freedom of use” (pp. 444-445). There was no chasm in this case because the innovation, which was the email policy, had not been implemented. However, Moore’s updated theory for what organizations should do after crossing the chasm seems to be happening in reverse in this. Rather than implementing the email policy and risking a chasm, the administrators engaged in learning about the librarians’ needs first. Therefore, the administrators could address the problems communicated by the respondents which suggest communication barriers that could hinder the use of email. If employees lack knowledge or training on the technology, they may lack the ability and motivation to use the technology to its fullest capability. A lack of certainty about email privacy could cause employees to be hesitant about using the technology or deter them from using it. Employees could lack motivation for learning to use its full features if they perceive administrators do not communicate their support by providing training, and for access and employees’ freedom to use the technology. Similarly, restrictive policies could hinder employees.

### **Crisis Information**

In a study (Egnoto, Svetieva, Vishwanath, & Ortega, 2013) that examined diffusion of information during a crisis (confirmed later as a false alarm) lasting approximately four hours, the authors found that about 75 percent of the sample (202 students) learned about the information via text message or another person, nearly 95 percent of students spread the information, and early knowers (20 percent) of the information were more trusting of a variety of channels/sources, and more trusting of interpersonal channels “phones, text messaging, face-to-face and direct email” than late knowers (25 percent) (p. 9). Further, students who learned about the event from the university rated the credibility much higher than those who received the information from “friends or mass media” (p. 9). Since diffusing information as quickly as possible is critical during crises, it is in the best interest of a university faced with this situation to seek ways

to close the gap between early knowers and late knowers. In order to close the gap, the individual/s managing the process must first recognize the communication barriers in this situation. The findings suggest communication barriers exist for late knowers because distrust of information sources can hinder the spreading of the information, and thereby limit diffusion of crisis information. Information on the distribution rates of the adopters suggest a chasm did not take place.

### **ICTs for Teaching and Learning**

Challenges involving the diffusion of e-teaching in Sahmyook University in Seoul, Korea, was the focus of another study (Kim & Lee, 2008). The university launched a plan to promote e-teaching within the institution in 2005 supported by a two million-dollar five-year government grant (p. 4). The authors found that two years after the promotional campaign was launched, less than 10 percent of faculty practiced e-teaching despite early adopters doing video presentations, an incentive for an e-learning course and “user friendly” software for teaching via the internet (p. 4). Thus, Kim and Lee concluded that the diffusion process resulted in a chasm between the early adopters and the early majority (p. 10). The findings were concluded from a statistical analysis of survey responses resulting from a sample of 77 faculty (p. 6). These findings suggest the communication that was diffused during the process was not effective. Therefore, using the diffusion of innovation framework, it could be argued that interpersonal communication was not likely diffused in a manner to influence the early majority and later adopters to adopt e-teaching. Likewise, those who acted as potential influencers (adopters doing video presentations) were not effective.

A study examining the use of blogs for pedagogy focused on the University of New England (UNE) in Australia, where blogs were introduced in late 2006 (Muwanga-Zake, Parkes, & Gregory, 2010). The University had an open policy, which means no guidelines for using blogs, and according to the authors, this policy encouraged the use of personal blogs and discouraged the use of serious

academic blogs (p. 11). The UNE blog use was surveyed from March 2007-2008, and the blog use of nine other universities was surveyed from February-March 2008 (p. 5). Of the 10 universities, only three blogged; UNE had no pedagogical blogs and 59 percent were personal; the other two universities had some course-related blogs with a smaller percentage of personal blogs (p. 8). These findings suggest the communication of an open policy versus specific guidelines for the blogs served as a communication barrier that discouraged faculty adopters of blogs. Or, on the other hand, one might view the open policy as lacking communication necessary to motivate faculty to adopt pedagogical blogs. Both views characterize a communication barrier in action. Since UNE had no pedagogical blogs, there was no chasm.

A distance learning university in Indonesia encouraged its faculty and students in its graduate studies program to use online communication for thesis advising to improve efficiency and effectiveness (Suciati, 2011, p. 216). Established in 1984, the university enrolled graduate students since 2003. After examining responses from a sample of 30 students concerning their perceptions of thesis advising in the program, the author concluded that the students were influenced by the faculty, most of who chose to advise students via less mediated channels (instant messaging, telephone, email) (p. 216). Most faculty also preferred thesis corrections delivered via postal mail (p. 222). Although slightly more than 50 percent of the students preferred corrections via postal mail, 65 percent of them contacted their advisers via the internet (p. 223-224). Even the students who sent thesis drafts electronically were not necessarily indicating that they preferred electronic editing (p. 225). The diffusion of online communication for thesis advising seemed to be hindered because most of the faculty chose not to become adopters and therefore, they did not encourage students to do so despite the urging of the university. Therefore, they hindered student adoption. There was not sufficient information to determine whether there was a chasm.

A study (Hodgkinson-Williams & Mostert, 2005) conducted from May to June 2000 focused on student perspectives about an online debating course. It was based on the premise that despite the benefits of online communication technologies, students do not always utilize them to their fullest potential (p. 94). The authors concluded that the lack of clarity about the procedures for online debating was a hindrance for students although they valued the course potential for immediate responses and discussion with others of different opinions (p. 102). Using email to communicate throughout the course, the students' responses to a questionnaire were that procedures pertaining to the goals of the debate and deadlines hindered their participation in the exercise (p. 100). The findings that there was a lack of clarity about procedures was a communication barrier which limited participation in the exercise. Insufficient information was available to determine whether there was a chasm.

Student perceptions of the introduction of a virtual learning environment technology was the focus of a study (Osgerby, 2013) conducted at the University of Winchester in the United Kingdom. Referred to as a blended approach, the technology was implemented in 2008, the same year of the study which was conducted for one year. The author studied the use of the technology in three financial management and accounting modules made available to undergraduate and post graduate students (p. 88). Findings that revealed communication problems included (a) students were reluctant to use the technology to participate in group work, and instead used social media, the mobile phone and email (p. 94-95); and (b) students believed the subject matter would require "considerable face-to-face instruction" because they viewed it as difficult (p. 90). Based on data collected from a focus group of 29 students, these findings suggest the communication barrier for the students was the inability of the technology to facilitate interpersonal communication and more direct or less mediated communication technology for group work. There was insufficient information to determine whether there was a chasm.

An examination of faculty adoption of Horizon Wimba technology for online learning was conducted by surveying faculty at Southeastern University (Martin, Parker, & Allred, 2013). The technology had been in place for five years (p. 128) prior to the study but only five percent of the faculty (602 full time, 288 part time) used it in their courses (p. 128). Of the 28 faculty who completed the surveys, approximately 21 percent were characterized as the late majority; 34 percent as early adopters; and 39 percent as innovators (p. 131). In response to follow-up interviews, conducted with six faculty about their perceptions and use of the technology, one instructor cited the difficulty in recognizing when students are confused as a disadvantage to virtual classrooms (p. 133). This communication barrier was not a major finding of Martin et al. study but it is noteworthy for this study. And, since only five percent of the university's entire faculty used the technology, using the lens of Rogers' and Moore's model, the low adoption rate actually suggests a chasm had not formed between the early adopters and early majority.

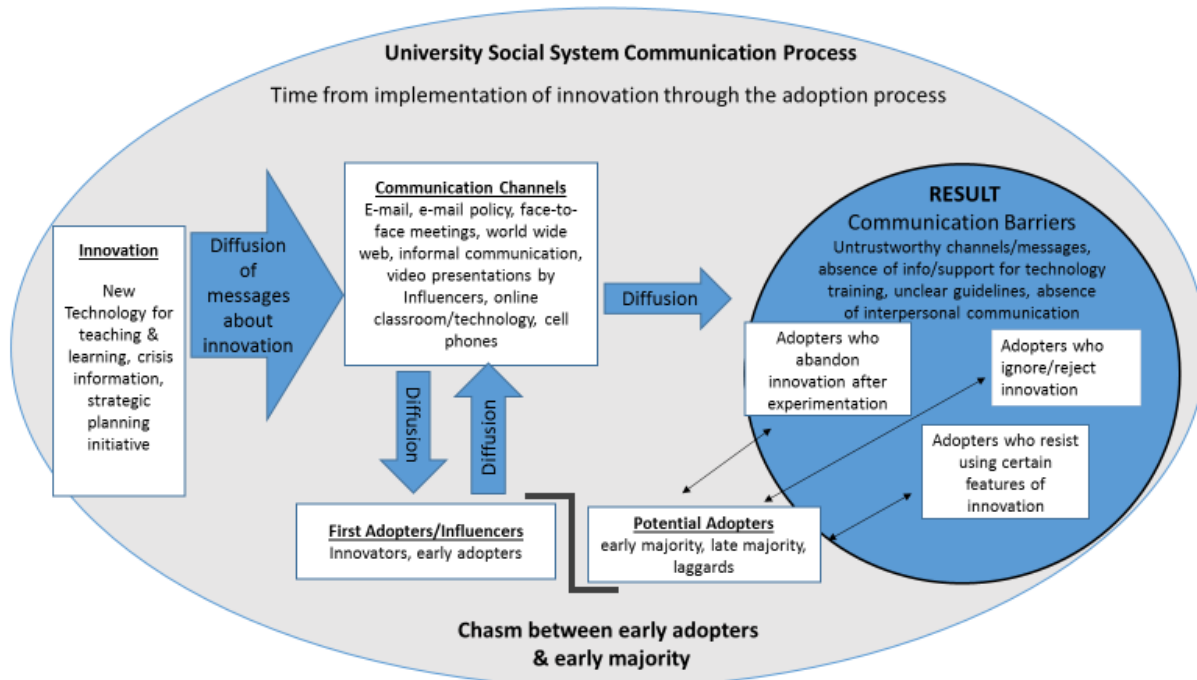
The University of Botswana adopted e-learning technology in 2001. It was the setting for a study that examined problems associated with e-learning for two humanities courses from 2005 to 2009 (Ikpe, 2011). The researcher found the humanities department was a lead adopter among other departments but by 2009, more faculty in the department abandoned their courses after experimenting with the technology than faculty in other departments (p. 91). Also, among the 1,655 courses adopted by the university including the humanities department, nearly 80 percent were abandoned by 2009. E-learning was part of a blended approach to instruction which combined face-to-face, online learning, and other technologies associated with e-learning (p. 85). Data collected from the classes and the student evaluations of slightly more than 3,500 students showed a (a) "consistent demand by students" for discussion outside of the online platform; (b) the use of abbreviated language such as that used via text messages and other non-formal language; (c) a lack of motivation to seek external sources for research; and (d) the absence of argumentative rigor (pp. 94-99). The author's findings suggest a chasm among the academic departments during the

university's adoption process of the e-learning technology. There is not information to determine whether there was a chasm in the academic departments or among students.

The reason some faculty adopted and then abandoned the technology could be related to student responses. Their responses suggest communication barriers that hinder adoption for both students and faculty. The students limited participation in online discussions and their desire for discussion outside of the online platform suggests a preference for interpersonal communication or less mediated forms of communication. The students' use of informal language online also suggests a preference for interpersonal communication and/or less mediated forms of communication. However, both instances serve as communication barriers for faculty who aim to enhance their learning and students who need to feel comfortable interacting with the platform, the teacher and their peers.

## **Discussion**

This study included a review of 10 case studies that were synthesized using Rogers' diffusion of innovations model and Moore's chasm between early adopters and the early majority. The findings helped to answer the research question, what are communication problems that act as barriers to hinder innovation diffusion in universities? The findings also provide support for the three claims argued in this study: (1) Managers need to identify potential communication problems to innovation; (2) A chasm jeopardizes implementation of an innovation for an organization; and (3) Managers in universities should seek to better understand the needs of students, faculty and staff before the adoption of an innovation begins in an effort to avoid communication barriers that hinder adoption. Below is a discussion of the conceptual framework used to answer the question, an explanation of the findings, and how the research addresses the claims which were made in the introduction.



Conceptual Framework of Rogers' Diffusion of Communication Process Leading to Communication Barriers *Figure 1.*

Diffusion of innovations hindered by communication barriers in universities. This conceptual view presents the communication process during innovation diffusion in a university social system that leads to communication barriers. The barriers hinder potential adopters in the environment and contribute a chasm between early adopters and the early majority.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) displays the elements of Rogers' diffusion of innovations during the communication process of the university social system. Specifically, the conceptual map provides a view of the communication process that leads to communication barriers which hinder the adoption of innovations discussed in 10 case studies reviewed for this study. Diffusion happens throughout a period of time from implementation of the innovation throughout the adoption process. The innovation is diffused through communication channels throughout the university social system and the first group of adopters (innovators and early adopters) adopt the innovation. Some of them may act as influencers by communicating about the innovation through

communication channels to encourage later adopters to adopt. Sometimes when the innovation is communicated through channels that are perceived as ineffective, the communication acts as a barrier for potential adopters. These potential adopters may ignore or explicitly reject the innovation. In some cases, they may have to adopt or use the innovation because it has been incorporated in their teaching or learning process. These adopters may later decide to abandon the innovation, reject some of the features or hesitate to use them as with e-technology, or information about crisis or strategic initiatives.

#### Narrative

Each of the 10 studies contributed to the analysis and synthesis of this study for answering the research question. However, for the purpose of transparency, table C1 (see Appendix C) provides the framework for how each study contributed to answering the research question. Also, a total percentage value was assigned to each article. Six of the articles (Egnoto et al., 2013; Hacker et al., 1998; Hill, 2007; Kim & Lee, 2008; Martin et al., 2013; Muwanga-Zake, 2010) were assigned a value of 100 percent, and the remaining four articles (Hodgkinson-Williams & Mostert, 2005; Ikbe, 2011; Suciati, 2011) were assigned a value of 75 percent.

A synthesis of the studies revealed four themes of communication barriers that hinder the adoption of innovation: a) channels or messages perceived as untrustworthy; (b) the absence of information or support for technology training; (c) unclear guidelines; and (d) absence of interpersonal communication. The communication problems found to support the first theme were a lack of trust for information sources (Egnoto et al., 2013) and uncertainty about email privacy (Hacker et al., 1998). Supporting the second theme were the communication problems concerning a lack of administrator support for training (Hacker et al.), difficulty with self education and evaluation (Kim & Lee, 2008), and an inability to handle technical difficulties (Martin et al., 2013). The communication problems supporting the third theme were a lack of rules or requirements (Muwanga-Zake & Gregory, 2010), and a lack of clarity about deadlines and procedures



(Hodgkinson-Williams & Mostert, 2005). The fourth theme was supported by the communication problems related to a desire for discussion outside of the online classroom and repeated use of informal language in the online environment (Ikbe, 2011), reports of insufficient interactions, unsatisfactory emotional exchanges (Kim & Lee), reports of instructor difficulty recognizing student confusion (Martin et al.), expressed expectation for face-to-face and reluctance to use e-technology for group work (Osgersby, 2013), and students' preference for face-to-face over e-technology for online thesis advising (Suciati, 2011). The findings provide evidence for the following claims.

### **Claims**

Claim 1. Managers need to identify potential communication problems to innovation diffusion.

The findings demonstrate that diffusion of innovations in universities can result in communication problems. When a university's communication about an innovation is not effective for influencing staff, faculty and/or students to adopt an innovation, the communication plays a role in hindering their adoption. Managers must seek to identify communication problems and take action to prevent them. One way to do this is to survey or hold forums with those who will be impacted to determine their expectations and needs as it relates to the innovation.

Claim 2. Since the idea of diffusion is to keep the process moving through each stage of adoption, when a chasm occurs, it jeopardizes implementation of the innovation for an organization.

There is some support for this claim although most of the studies did not provide evidence for a chasm between the early adopters and the early majority during the adoption process. However, in the instances where a chasm occurred, the findings (Hill, 2007; Kim & Lee, 2008) suggested that it jeopardized the process because many adopters ignored the innovation. In a university, as with any organization where an innovation has been implemented, managers need to manage and monitor the process so they are alert to when a chasm occurs. To address communication problems that cause a chasm, managers should recognize that the early majority group needs suitable references and communication that the innovation will help them to improve how they carry out their

responsibilities in the organization. Finding solutions to address this problem will help to overcome the chasm, so the innovation continues to diffuse through the process.

Claim 3. Managers in universities should seek to better understand the needs of students, faculty and staff before the adoption of an innovation begins in an effort to avoid or overcome communication barriers that hinder adoption. There was support for this claim because the communication problems identified in this study were the concerns of potential adopters or those who had already adopted the innovation. It is reasonable to expect that managers in the university were not aware of these concerns related to the innovation prior to implementation. However, in one case (Hacker et al., 1998), a survey was conducted prior to implementation to determine the views of those who would be impacted. This action is partially supported by Moore's crossing the chasm theory because, in this study, it can be applied before implementation of an innovation. The theory suggests universities can learn from their mistakes to be more successful at diffusing innovations through their organizations.

## **Conclusion**

This study included a review of 10 case studies which were synthesized to answer the question, what are communication problems that act as barriers to hinder innovation diffusion in universities? The findings from the synthesis revealed four themes of communication barriers. They are channels or messages perceived as untrustworthy, the absence of information or support for technology training, unclear guidelines, and the absence of interpersonal communication. Half of the studies included at least one communication problem related to the theme of the absence of interpersonal communication. This finding correlates with Rogers' (1983) model in that interpersonal communication is more appropriate than mass communication for influencing the adoption decision of a potential adopter. Most importantly, the findings provide scholarly evidence for managers responsible for managing innovation diffusion in universities.

## **Limitations**

There are limitations to this research as with all research. One limitation is that REAs are less rigorous and substantive than systematic studies which would allow for a more comprehensive study and an examination of numerous studies. Also, the small sample of 10 articles which were reviewed limits generalizability. Another limitation is the study focused only on the university setting.

### **Management Implications**

Managers in universities should recognize that how their organizations communicate an innovation can influence the adoption decision of potential adopters. They should be alert to potential communication barriers that can hinder an adoption of an innovation. Communication barriers may be perceived by potential adopters as ineffective and/or inappropriate because of the channels that are used during the diffusion, the messages about the innovation, and/or the source of the communication. Managers who are pro-active will help to ensure that their organizations continuously innovate to enhance teaching and learning.

### **Implications for Scholarship**

This study fills the void in scholarly research on communication problems that hinder adoption of innovations and particularly in the context of universities. An examination of the issue through the lens of Rogers' diffusion of innovations and Moore's chasm provides a unique perspective about innovation and the adoption process.

### **Future Research**

Suggestions for future research could include an examination of communication barriers to innovation in different settings. An examination could also include a comparison of the communication barriers in several different settings, such as government, nonprofit, and business. Research may also include an examination of other types of barriers that hinder the adoption of innovations.

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## APPENDIX A

### Twenty Articles Selected from Search Results That Met Inclusion Criteria

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## APPENDIX B

Table B1  
Quality and Relevance Appraisal

<b>Article</b>	<b>WoE A = 30%</b> Soundness of Studies	<b>WoE B = 30%</b> Appropriateness of study design for answering the review	<b>WoE C = 40%</b> Relevance of the study focus to the review	<b>WoE D (A+B+C): OVERALL APPRAISAL</b>
13)	HIGH: Explicit, detailed methods, results sections for data collection & analysis	HIGH: Case study, framework, & findings provide evidence for synthesis	MEDIUM: Sample population & context related to university diffusion, adopters of an innovation; purpose of study was not to identify communication problems	80%
Hacker (1998)	HIGH: Explicit, detailed methods, results sections for data collection & analysis	MEDIUM: Case study, framework, & findings partially provide evidence for synthesis	MEDIUM: Sample population & context related to adopters & innovation (not yet diffused) in a university; purpose of study was not to identify communication problems	65%
Hill (2007)	HIGH: Explicit, detailed methods & results sections for data collection and analysis	HIGH: Case study, framework, and findings provide evidence for synthesis	MEDIUM: Sample population & context related to university diffusion, adopters of an innovation; primary purpose of study was not to identify communication problems	80%

Hodgkinson-Williams & Mostert (2005)	HIGH: Explicit, detailed methods & results sections for data collection and analysis	MEDIUM: Case study, framework, & findings provide partial evidence for synthesis	MEDIUM: Sample population & context related to university diffusion, adopters of an innovation; primary purpose of study was not to identify communication problems	65%
Ikpe (2011)	HIGH: Explicit, detailed methods & results sections for data collection and analysis	MEDIUM: Case study, framework, & findings provide partial evidence for synthesis	MEDIUM: Sample population & context related to university diffusion, adopters of an innovation; primary purpose of study not to identify communication problems	65%
Kim & Lee (2008)	HIGH: Explicit, detailed methods, results sections for data collection & analysis	HIGH: Case study, framework, & findings provide evidence for synthesis	MEDIUM: Sample population & context related to university diffusion, adopters of an innovation; primary purpose of study was not to identify communication problems	80%
Martin & et al. (2013)	HIGH: Explicit, detailed methods, results sections for data collection & analysis	HIGH: Case study, framework, & findings provide evidence for synthesis	MEDIUM: Sample population & context related to university diffusion, adopters of an innovation; primary purpose of study was not to identify	80%

			communication problems	
Suciati (2011)	HIGH: Explicit, detailed methods, results sections for data collection and analysis	MEDIUM: Case study, framework, findings provide partial evidence for synthesis	MEDIUM: Sample population & context related to university diffusion and adopters of an innovation; primary purpose of study was not to identify communication problems	65%

*Note:* This chart provides a weighted quality and relevance appraisal for each study used for synthesis. A rating of “low” carries no value, a rating of “medium” carries half value, and a rating of “high” carries the full value. Maximum weight is 100 percent and all studies are above the cutoff value of 50 percent. Adapted from “Quality and Relevance Appraisal,” by A. Harden and D. Gough, in D. Gough, S. Oliver, and J. Thomas, *An Introduction to Systematic Reviews* (pp. 161-162), 2012, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Copyright 2012 by Sage. Adapted with permission.

## APPENDIX C

Table C1

Table of Analysis and Synthesis of Articles

<b>Study</b>	<b>Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Elements</b> Time/Innovation/Communication/Social Process (25%)	<b>Moore's Chasm</b> (25%)	<b>Communication Barriers</b> (25%)	<b>Synthesis Themes</b> (25%)	<b>TOTAL Contribution to Synthesis</b>
Egnoto et al. (2013)	4 hrs/crisis/phones, text messaging, face-to-face & direct email/students in university	No	*Not trusting of information sources	*Communication barriers are channels or messages perceived as untrustworthy.	100%
Hill (2007)	2 yrs/emails about strategic planning process/emails, world wide web, informal communication, meetings/planning committee, faculty, staff, students in university	Yes	Too many emails (information overload), ****information distributed to mass group of people does not pertain to "me"	**Communication barriers are the absence of information or support for technology training.	100%
Hacker (1998)	Not applicable/email policy/not applicable/library employees in university	No	**Lack of administrator enforcement, support for training & knowledge, *uncertain about email privacy, concern about restrictive email policy	***Communication barriers are unclear guidelines.	100%
Hodgkinson-Williams & Mostert (2005)	1 month/online debating course/emails, listserv/students, faculty in university	Insufficient info	***Lack of clarity about deadlines & procedures	****Communication barriers are the absence of interpersonal	75%

				communication.	
Ikbe (2011)	4-8 yrs/e-learning/online classroom/students, faculty in university	Insufficient info	****Desired discussion offline; students used	****Communication barriers are the absence of interpersonal communication.	75%
Kim & Lee (2008)	2 yrs./e-teaching/promotional plan, early adopters' videos/faculty, students in university	Yes	****Insufficient interactions, unsatisfactory emotional exchanges, **difficulty w/self education and evaluation	**Communication barriers are the absence of information or support for technology training.	100%
Martin et al. (2013)	5 years/online teaching/online technology/students, faculty in university	No	****Instructor difficulty recognizing student confusion, **don't know how to handle technical difficulties	***Communication barriers are unclear guidelines.	100%
Muwanga-Zake & Gregory (2010)	1-2 yrs/academic blogs/open policy, IT support group blogs/faculty, students in university	No	Open policy (**no rules, requirements *training,)	****Communication barriers are the absence of interpersonal communication.	100%
Osgersby (2013)	1 year/virtual learning technology/course modules supported by technology/students in university	Insufficient info	****Expected difficult course to be face-to-face; reluctant to use technology for group work	****Communication barriers are the absence of interpersonal communication.	75%

Suciati (2011)	5 yrs/online thesis advising/email, phone, instant messaging, face-to-face/faculty, students in university	Insufficient info	Lack of encouragement from teachers, ****students prefer face-to-face	****Communication barriers are the absence of interpersonal communication.	75%
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Note: The diffusion element of time is based on when the university implemented the innovation for studies with the primary focus on faculty, and for studies primarily focused on students taking a class, the time is based on the length of the study. The number of asterisks assigned to a communication barrier indicates what theme it contributed to. For example, a barrier that received one asterisk contributed to the theme on untrustworthy channels and messages. Each of the four categories (columns 2-4) is assigned the weight of 25 percent for a total of 100 percent contribution to the synthesis. If an article included sufficient information for each category, then the contribution for that article to the synthesis is 100 percent. However, if the article included sufficient information in three out of four of the categories, the contribution is 75 percent.

# **Don't Bite my Bytes: A Burkeian Analysis of Corporate Responses to Data Theft in Cyberattacks**

**Tammy L. Croghan, Northwestern State University**

**Jon M. Croghan, Northwestern State University**

**Reagan Escude, Northwestern State University**

**Abstract:** It is essential for organizations to acquire data on both its employees and customers or clients in today's global markets. Having the right data can facilitate such disparate corporate activities as purchasing, shipping, payroll, and employment. Organizations live and die based on the quality of the data available to them. While not a panacea, data drives production, marketing, and consumption globally. The importance of data has not been lost on hostile actors intent upon acquiring this information surreptitiously for their own gain. The frequency of cyber-attacks on critical infrastructures, customer information, and intellectual property rights has seen dramatic increases over the last decade (Keefe, 2012; Mansfield, 2017; Schmitz, 2016). The IT professionals tasked with protecting corporate resources foresee even more attacks in the future (Thompson 2017).

Despite the possible consequences to the organization, cyber-attacks are often concealed or minimized by the companies targeted. The complaint of Cashell, Jackson, Jickling, and Webel launch on corporate responses to cyber-attacks that "firms and organizations have strong incentives to conceal information about cyber-attacks, and there are significant uncertainties and measurement difficulties that limit our ability to specify the dollar amount at risk from information security breaches" (2004, p 1) has changed very little in the subsequent thirteen years since publication. This project will analyze three distinct corporate responses to cyber-attacks and the rhetorical strategies used.

**Methodology:**

**Rhetorical Artifacts**

This project will analyze four distinct corporate responses to cyber-attacks and the rhetorical strategies used. The three cyber-attacks to be examined are the Peace cyber-attack, both cyber-attacks on Yahoo in 2016, and the 2017 cyber-attack on Equifax.

**Burkeian Framework:**

This is a qualitative project using Burkeian framework and concepts to analyze four corporate responses to data loss from cyber-attacks. This project will initially examine the Burkeian conceptions of identification and division. Burke writes in *Permanence and Change*, humans "do not communicate by a neutral vocabulary" (p. 162). This inability to use neutral language forces all communication into the modalities of identification and division. When examining rhetorical artifacts using a Burkeian framework, it is important to consider the terministic screens of the speaker towards the intended audience and ratios of the rhetorical elements of the dramatistic pentad. According to Burke in *Language as Symbolic Action* "a screen composed of toward terms through which humans perceive the world, and that direct attention away from some interpretations and others" (p. 45). Dramatism on a fundamental level is simply who, what, where, when, how, and why. For Burke, dramatism is "a technique of analysis of language and of thought as basically modes of action rather than a means of conveying information." (p. 81). The choices of dramatistic ratios used by a rhetor or, in this case, rhetorical artifact, purposely highlights certain elements of the communication, while obscuring other relevant information.

**Conclusion:**



Organizations spend millions of dollars each year on decisions surrounding the security of their internal data and the safety of data collected from external publics. It is important for organizations to have a plan for the type of crisis communication they intend to use in the case of data loss from cyber-attacks. This analysis shows some fundamental flaws with corporate responses to this data loss. These communicative events generally have one fatal flaw, they focus on minimizing the possible impacts to the individuals involved. Additionally, these four examples offer little clear guidance on assistance that will be offered or what they will specifically do to improve the safety of their data. Ideally these artifacts will improve both the corporate communication arising from the cyber-attacks and the actual IT systems and solutions for cyber-attacks.

# **Workplace Manners and Civility: Students' Perceptions and Experiences**

**Sandra H. Bevill, Arkansas State University**

**Karen McDaniel, Arkansas State University**

**Abstract:** In 1992, etiquette author Hilka Klinkenberg wrote that etiquette is a projection of ourselves, and “good manners [are] all about putting people at ease” (as cited by Buhler, 2000, p. 14). In 1998, Daniel Goleman, author of the 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence*, wrote that “we’re being judged by a new yardstick: not just how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also how well we handle ourselves and each other” (as cited by Forouzan & Fredrick, 2016, p. 90). A 2005 article reported that 40% of executives believe that today’s professionals are less courteous than they were a decade ago (“Mind your Manners,” 2005). In 2010, Anna Bass wrote about developing professional presence, which is comprised of qualities including empathy, awareness of the needs of others, knowledge of people skills, and respect for others; she goes on to describe professional presence as an intangible quality that “sets an individual apart and instills a sustainable competitive advantage” (2010, p. 57).

Research and articles citing the need for better manners, courtesy, respect, and/or civility in the workplace continue well into the late 2000s. In their 2011 study on civility in America, Shandwick and Tate found that 43% of the one thousand Americans surveyed reported experiencing incivility at work while 67% indicated the need for civility training in the workplace. And in 2017, Peter Post, author of *The Etiquette Advantage in Business*, writes about the Incivility Vicious Circle in which stressed workers tend to focus more on how they feel rather than how others feel; and, this loss of awareness of how others feel, may result in the stressed workers’ actions may become rude or uncivil which, in turn, creates more stress; thus, the incivility circle continues.

These soft skills--respect for others, good manners, courteous or civil, professionalism-- and are more than just nice characteristics to have. They are good for business. A survey by Johns Hopkins University found that besides in addition to being frustrating, “a lack of courtesy in the workplace can have a direct effect on business productivity” (“Mind your Manners,” 2005, p. 50). In their book, *The Cost of Bad Behavior: How Incivility is Damaging Your Business and What to do About It*, Christine Pearson and Christine Porath (2009) define incivility as “the exchange of seemingly inconsequential, inconsiderate words and deeds that violate conventional norms of workplace behavior” and warn that incivility is doing “untold commercial damage to businesses” (Stern, 2009, p. 10).

What are these behaviors that show a lack of professionalism or are rude, discourteous, uncivil, or indicate bad manners? What effect do these behaviors have on the employees and the business? What do our students know or think about the importance of having good manners and civility in the workplace? What are their experiences with these types of behaviors? Finally, what can or should faculty do to help prepare students to have more civility, better manners, more professionalism, and professional presence in their careers?

The purpose of this presentation will be to discuss the questions above and present the findings of the first part of a study on student perceptions and experiences with manners and civility in the workplace.

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# **The Persistent Gap: Why do Business Graduates' Soft Skills Continue to Defy Employer Expectations and How Can Business Curriculum Reshape to make up the Difference**

**Lorelei Amanda Ortiz, St. Edward's University**

**Catherine MacDermott, St. Edward's University**

**Abstract:** We have heard the discussions for decades. Scholarly research articles, noted business publications, and well-respected business executives have been talking about the on-going challenge of finding employees—and in particular, new graduates—who possess job readiness skills. Two significant questions reiterated in books and articles since the 1990s have dealt with (1) how employers find good workers with desirable employability skills and (2) what training is necessary for those lacking the required skills (Hofstrand, 1996; Taylor, 1998; Tanyel et al., 1999). A larger question raised today impacts colleges and universities around the world: what role do colleges and universities play in providing graduates the requisite soft skills demanded in today's workforce? In the U.S., this question has never been more relevant given the growing and well documented disconnect between perceptions of job readiness—where students claim readiness while employers disagree (Jaschik, 2015)—and the 72% increase in the number of international students in American universities since 2000 (Haynie, 2014).

In 1999, John Reed, Chairman of Citicorp and the Academy of Management's Distinguished Executive of the year, asked of business schools, "do you give students a set of skills that is going to serve them well over their careers?" An interesting debate ensued: how well are colleges and universities preparing graduates for the workplace? The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) as well as the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) conducts annual employer surveys about new graduate career preparation. Along with determining employer needs, other research has looked at the gap between what the workplace demands of new hires and how well colleges and universities are helping students translate their academic accomplishments into workplace success (Peddle, 2000; Tewari and Sharma, 2016; Dragoo and Barrows, 2016; David & David, 2011; Thomas 2007).

Oblinger and Verville (1998) answered John Reed's 1999 question by stating, "the work world has changed enormously and higher education has not." Instead, universities and colleges were seen as places that train students to proclaim their ideas, rather than expose students to the values of being exceptional communicators. Furthermore, employers were critical of schools producing graduates who were able to apply business-school formulas but who were not skilled in being collaborative thinkers trained in problem solving and communication, competencies needed to be not only academically ready but job ready (Carnevale and Fry, 2001; Wardrope and Bayless, 1999; Robinson et al., 2007; Tewari and Sharma, 2016; Minton-Eversole, 2012).

Historical wisdom in job readiness research suggests that this need for the "ready" employee has always existed, and despite many efforts to shrink the skills gap, it persists. Increasingly, however, both employers and new graduates are aware of these necessary readiness skills and seem to agree on their importance. This creates a perfect opportunity for business schools to foster curricular environments that support soft skills achievement and provide both graduates and employers that important link to complete the chain of successful employability.

This presentation outlines the recent history of business graduates' job readiness from the

perspective of relevant research in the areas of workplace soft skills, training, employer perceptions, and the role of colleges and universities (beyond the business communication course) in preparing business students to enter the workforce. Also featured are findings of a survey of 108 new hires in the U.S. regarding their perception of the most important soft skills necessary for job effectiveness and those skills most utilized in their jobs compared to findings of a similar survey of 72 U.S. employers and what they rate as most important soft skills. From this presentation, ABC audience members can fortify their historical understanding of “job readiness” from both the employer and graduate standpoint, identify current soft skills trending as desired employability skills for business graduates, and ascertain where and how business curriculum can reshape in order to provide business students the necessary soft skills to meet employer demands, starting on day-one of employment.

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## **Connecting with Companies for Experiential Learning**

**Donna Greenwald, Bowling Green State University**

**Abstract:** My innovative teaching project incorporates an experiential learning project into my business communication course. I work with the College of Business' Career Accelerator Office to identify employers who hire our students and are interested in participating in this project. This semester I have five employers lined up who are writing real-world business scenarios derived from their companies on either a persuasive situation or a negative message scenario. Students are presented with the case studies prior to a certain class time and are required to draft the messages, in small groups (2-3 students), based on the cases. The employers attend class on certain dates to review the student-drafted messages on Canvas's Collaboration tool and provide constructive, spontaneous feedback to the students on their writing.

Through this experiential learning project, student learning is more memorable and they see it has more value because the cases come from employers at real companies. Students also receive feedback on writing business messages from successful working professionals and not just the instructor's feedback. This provides an opportunity for mentorship, networking, and collaboration between students and employers.

Benefits to the employers include getting in front of students to introduce their companies, beginning to create networks with business students, identifying students they might want to hire for a future position, and serving as a professional mentor for students. I had no problem getting employers to participate. I had to turn away employers who wanted to participate this semester.

For the ABC presentation in March, I can provide feedback collected from surveys given to the employers and the students.

# **A Study on Former Dancing Stars' Transferable Skills, Career Transition Support, and New Career Satisfaction**

**Leslie Ramos Salazar, West Texas A&M University**

**Abstract:** Today's American professional dancers retire from their dancing careers as early as the age of 30 due to injury, age, or family responsibilities (Hutter, 2012). Given the early retirement age, dancers seek a second career to support themselves and their families until they reach an age that enables them to obtain their state pension (Roncaglia, 2006). However, many retiring professional dancers encounter substantial challenges during their career transition to a second career from a lack of education, career, and skill development (Jeffri, 2005). Given that professional dancers must compete for jobs with individuals who are at the mid-level of their careers, professional dancers must be able to adapt their transferable skills in order to be competitive enough to be "employable" in secondary careers (Roncaglia, 2006). Professional dancers may also need to retrain themselves by obtaining advanced academic degrees to sharpen their existing skills to seek new non-dancing careers (Jeffri, 2005).

Previous studies have investigated the challenges of the career transition process of American dancers. Studies have reported that retired dancers experience negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety, and ambivalence during the transition process (Pickman, 1987). To cope with these effects, Doerr (1999) found that social and emotional support may help facilitate the transition process into new careers. Similarly, in a qualitative study, Roncaglia (2006) found that emotional support and social support from family and friends helped retiring professional dancers cope with the career transition process. Another study by Willard and Lavalley (2006) found that social support had a positive influence in retired ballet dancers' overall quality of career transition. Studies have also found positive correlations among the transition process, social support, and the job satisfaction of individuals in their secondary careers (Lounsbury et al., 2004; Kim, Rhee, Ha, Yang, & Lee, 2016).

In addition, individuals who retire from performance-based careers with transferable social skills such as communication, leadership, and cooperation may be more likely to be successful in their new careers (Clokier & Fourie, 2016; Haasler, 2013; Pickman, 1987). Because employers often seek and prioritize employees with transferable social skills (e.g., communication), examining these skills provide insight into the effectiveness of retired dancers' career transition processes (Clokier & Fourie, 2016; Watson, 2003). While previous studies have explored the career transition process of performers, these studies have not explored whether dancers' transferable social skills (e.g., communication) impact received social and emotional support through interactions. Also, prior studies have not examined how support processes impact the job satisfaction of former dancers' new careers. Therefore, the primary aim of this study was to examine professional dancers' transferable skills such as communication, leadership, and cooperation in obtaining emotional and social support during the new career transition process. The secondary aim of this study examines whether preparation for transition, emotional support, and social support positively predict new career satisfaction. Lastly, this study explored sex differences in receiving social and emotional support during the new career transition process.

This study employed a mailed survey approach using a national sample of professional dancers (157 females and 62 males,  $n = 220$ ) from the U.S. and data were collected from the aDvANCE Project (Jeffri, Schriel, & Throsby, 2003). Participants' average age was 36-40 years of age and the majority of participants were White (77.3%). The highest level of non-dance education completed included 2.3% primary school, 21.4% secondary school, 9.5% post-secondary diploma, 36.8%

Bachelor's degree, 14.5% graduate degree, and 15.5% indicated an alternative education source. Participants responded to demographic questions and perceptions questions about their transferable skills, emotional support, social support, preparation for transition, and new career satisfaction.

To analyze the data, simple linear regression analyses and independent sample t-tests were run using SPSS 22.0. First, after controlling for demographic variables, possessing leadership skills positively predicted emotional support during new career transition. However, communication skills did not predict emotional support during new career transition. Second, after controlling for demographic variables, possessing cooperation skills positively predicted social support from family and friends, but this relationship did not influence new career satisfaction. Also, communication and leadership skills did not predict social support from family and friends. Third, after controlling for demographic variables (sex, age, educational degree), preparation for a new career transition positively predicted satisfaction with their new chosen non-dance career. Fourth, after controlling for the demographic variables, perceived emotional support from interactions positively predicted new career satisfaction. Fifth, sex differences were found in family and friend social support in new career transition processes.

Findings from this study yield several implications for professional dancers and dance organizations. First, transferrable skills such as leadership and cooperation can be beneficial to obtaining invaluable social support during the new career transition process. Second, during the transition process, it is important to seek emotional support to enhance one's satisfaction with one's new career. Third, professional dancers who seek to retire may need to prepare sufficiently for their career transition to be more satisfied with their new careers. Fourth, investing time to develop communication skills through workshops and seminars may facilitate professional dancers' transition into their new careers. Lastly, dance organizations may need to be cognizant of dancers' needs during the new career transition process, especially those who are retiring due to work injury/illness, age, or family responsibilities. For instance, dance organizations and non-profit dance agencies may provide support services and external government resources (e.g., [actorsfund.org](http://actorsfund.org); [dancersover40.org](http://dancersover40.org)) to help dancers during their new career transition process.

In sum, this study examined the transferable skills, career transition support, and new career satisfaction of former dancers. The findings from this study may stimulate additional interpersonal communication research that may focus on the role of communication and support during the new career transition process. Overall, this study underscores the value of examining the new career transition process of former dancers.

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# **Students' Expectations for the Undergraduate Business Communications Course**

**Julie McDonald, Northwestern State University**

**Margaret S. Kilcoyne, Northwestern State University**

**Begona Perez-Mira, Northwestern State University**

## **Abstract: Introduction**

The business communication course equips students with communicative skills and techniques and prepares them to work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. The business communication course has established itself as an important subject area and has become an important component of business school curricula (Du-Babcock, 2006). In many schools of business, it is a course that is required for all the majors (e.g., accounting, computer information systems, and business administration etc.).

What do students expect from an undergraduate business communication course? As faculty, we know that if we fail to live up to student expectations we are likely to receive poor student evaluations (Gaultney and Cann, 2001; Millea and Grimes, 2002). Making the situation more difficult is the idea that student expectations throughout a student's tenure may change over time (Boulding et al. 1993). Expectations may change as a student becomes accustomed to the requirements and normal procedures of the school (Li and Kaye, 1999). Thus, classroom expectations of freshman may be different from those of junior college transfer students which in turn may be different from students in different majors throughout the University (Richardson, Kring and Davis, 1997).

Student surveys or course evaluations are often used to get the necessary information or feedback about the undergraduate courses. These are usually standard forms used for all courses and for all professors at the university. Some, as in the case of this study, are created with some pre-determined objectives in mind. Those objectives were to try to determine what the students' expectations were for the course, before the course started.

Student evaluations of courses are often thought to be ineffective or of questionable value. However, the students' expectations about courses can be a powerful tool in assessing the business communications course. According to Patton (2015), John A Holland, director of the writing program at the University of Southern California, said "We want students to know that their opinions do matter." Student opinions are only one measure, but they are one that we can use to try to improve both the content and the methods of delivery used in the business communication course.

Most of the time, instructors know what we expect from students. We have course objectives and we use those to assess students' work and the course itself. But do we ask the students what they expect from our courses? There is sometimes a significant difference between what the students expect and the actual course requirements. There is also sometimes a significant difference in the level of the students' abilities for writing and speaking in a business setting and their actual abilities

## **Problem**

To meet and maintain accreditation standards, business programs are expected to determine the effectiveness of their undergraduate programs and to assess those programs regularly. One aspect of the assessment process is usually checking to see what students already know about the subject. For example, giving each student a pre-test over the material during the first week of the course. Understanding the expectations the students have for the course can also be very beneficial for instructors when they are assessing the business communication course. Specific questions considered for this study are: What are our students' expectations and perceptions about the Business Communications course? Do students expect to have to actually write and make presentations? And, how do these students rank themselves in the areas of business writing and speaking?

### Purpose

The purpose of the proposal is (1) to determine what current students are expecting to learn as they begin the Business communication course; (2) to determine which activities/assignments students would expect to be given in order to learn that material; and (3) to determine how the students rank their current knowledge and abilities as they pertain to business writing and presentations. This will be an exploratory study to examine the expectations and perceptions of current students of the Business Communications course in a rural, regional, four-year university.

### Population

The population for the study is students enrolled in the Business Communications course (BUAD 2200) during the fall, 2017 semester. Only students in the three face-to-face sections of this course were surveyed. Approximately 75 students took the survey.

### Methodology

The data was collected using an online survey/questionnaire created in SurveyMonkey. It was given during the first week of the course, before any material had been introduced. The survey asks the students to give their name and the section of the course they were enrolled in and their major. Students were asked open ended questions about what they expected to learn and what activities/assignments they expected to complete for the course. Two Likert-type questions were also included that asked them to rate their own business writing and speaking abilities. A copy of the survey will be included in the final paper. The responses will be downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. We will use a Word Analysis program (ATLAS Ti) to analyze the text. Some descriptive data will also be reported.

### Implications for Education

The need to understand student expectations, as well as to develop appropriate methods for managing and assessing expectations, is clearly important. This research contributes to our understanding of what students expect from a university course and examines factors that may contribute to differences among students' expectations. This data can be used to understand the expectations and perceptions that our students have about the Business Communications course and then to possibly enhance and redesign the Business Communications course if necessary. It can be used as a model for other courses. Hopefully, the findings from this pilot study can aid the instructors in helping the students understand the course objectives and to have realistic expectations about the course material, assignments, as well as, their own abilities to speak and write in business situations. It may also help instructors design and deliver an introductory business communication course that motivates students, enables them to achieve academic learning outcomes, and improves their business communication competencies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace.

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# **Faculty Views of Communication Issues with Students at a Traditional University**

**Eddie Horton, Northwestern State University**

**Abstract:** Communication between students and faculty is essential, yet there are major differences in the way students and faculty approach communication. There is a disconnect in communication between students and instructors, especially in traditional brick and mortar schools. Studies have shown that a disconnect exists, and approached the faculty on this topic, but little research has focused on student views of this topic. This problem of communication disconnection becomes even more exacerbated as students take blended semesters of both online and face to face classes. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the reasons for the disconnection in communication between students and instructors at traditional universities. This study is built around the theoretical framework of the communication process, the communications privacy management theory, and the uncertainty reduction theory.

James and Cinelli (2003) identified the communication process in five steps. First, the sender has some piece of information to transmit. Second, that information is encoded in some way so that it can be sent. Encoding can be verbal, whereby an idea is shared from a person, or nonverbal, perhaps encoded in an email. Third, some channel must exist to transmit the message. This can be voice, if the sender is talking to someone, or by means of an email server in the electronic world. Fourth, the receiver must receive and decode the message. Finally, the receiver acknowledges receipt of the message (James & Cinelli, 2003).

The uncertainty reduction theory poses three ways uncertainty affects communication (Kramer, 1999). This theory, first developed in 1975, states that uncertainty in communication exists and, in some situations, cannot be controlled or understood. The first part of the theory explains that, as communication increases, uncertainty in communication decreases (Kramer, 1999). In thinking about a classroom, for example, uncertainty in communication is very high on the first day when students meet the instructor. Uncertainty is high because they do not know the expectations or styles of that instructor. As the class continues, the students learn more about the instructor. Learning new information about the instructor causes the students' level of uncertainty to decrease. In this case, an example of an uncontrollable aspect could be student motivation (Kittrell & Moore, 2013). No matter what the sender does, if the receiver is unwilling or unable to receive the message, effective communication will not take place. Uncertainty is unavoidable, but it can be mitigated to an extent (Kittrell & Moore, 2013).

The communication privacy management theory discusses information from the perspective of the sender wanting to keep some information public and some private (Frampton & Child, 2013). With electronic communication being such a driving force, this theory becomes important because a receiver can form a biased impression of a sender or information before the communication is even sent. An illustrative example of this is information found on a Facebook page. If a student views the personal page of an instructor and determines that the instructor is overly religious, the student may form a bias against this instructor even though no communication has taken place. Another issue with electronic communication exists in that it can be stored indefinitely and security breaches can make potential private exchanges public. Facebook, for example, retains information for an indefinite time and reserves the right to sell some of that information to third parties (Facebook, 2017).

The study population included 10 students and 10 faculty at a traditional university. Research questions were designed to explore the reasons for the disconnection between students and instructors at a traditional university and measures taken to reduce the communication disconnection between students and instructors at a traditional university. The research questions ended with an open-ended interview question about advice. A five-phase data analysis was used to

compile the information into one source, code data, reassemble or review the themes that emerged from coding, interpret data, and finally draw conclusions based on the data. Methodological triangulation and member validation added trustworthiness to this study.

The findings indicated that approachability seems to be the major factor. Faculty feel they are approachable and encourage students to approach them while the students felt faculty were generally not approachable which is why many preferred email or other asynchronous communication methods. These findings can be used to give both students and faculty directions on how to better communicate with counterparts, and can be used by administration to develop training material for faculty on how to better communicate with students.

Future researchers can use the findings of this study as a starting point in building a framework for more effective student-faculty and faculty-student communication. While the literature referenced a few studies on demographics, a primary finding of this research was the role played by age. A future study looking directly at how faculty-student interaction is affected by age might reveal a deeper understanding of the disconnect in communication between faculty and students.

# **Ethical Implications of Communicating Mass School Shooting Information**

**Ashley Katherine Yuckenberg, George Mason University**

Abstract: There is a long-standing debate between researchers as to the amount of influence journalists have over public opinion. McCluskey (2017) states journalists select stories they cover based on a number of outside influences, including what they perceive the public will read, advertisers want, personal beliefs, and what their editors want. He says, "News is socially constructed, dependent upon a wide range of factors. Based upon those norms and practices, it is perhaps inevitable that traumatic events like a rampage school shooting would receive extensive news coverage" (McCluskey, 2017, p. 13). Ultimately the adage "if it bleeds it leads" (Sontag, 2003, p. 18) still stands true in that journalists believe breaking news of violence sells papers, even more so when the victims are innocent people from a population that should be protected, as explained by Cavararo (2004) in her theory of the rhetoric of horror. This is why mass shootings at schools are typically highly reported front page news. The main focus of this paper looks at this idea of "if it bleeds it leads" (Sontag, 2003, p.18), and the increase of violent rhetoric to draw in readers. Are major news organizations using language when covering school shootings aimed at increasing fear or horror among readers, and if so is there a way news organizations can improve their coverage of school shootings? Can mass school shootings be covered more ethically?

# **Leading with a Two-edged Sword: An Existentialist View of Organizational Storytelling**

**Laural Adams, Virginia Commonwealth University**

**Abstract:** This presentation explores the communication practice of organizational storytelling (Boje 2008; Denning 2001; Gabriel 2000) through the lens of organizational existentialism (OE) (Pauchant and Morin 2008), and argues that this lens can help us understand both the constructive and destructive power of narrative, as well as the ethical dimensions associated with meaning-making in organizations. Researchers have previously considered authentic leadership through the lens of OE, noting that inauthenticity is inevitable; further, to create spaces for authenticity, leaders and followers must be free to create their own meaning (Algera and Lips-Wiersma 2012). Storytelling is one method by which members make sense of their experiences in organizations (Weick 2012; Colville, Brown and Pye 2012). Storytelling helps organizational members establish identities for themselves and their organizations (Humphreys and Brown 2002). However, in addition to helping us order and respond to our environments, this communication practice also circumscribes our identities, and this boundedness constrains what we believe to be our available actions. Therefore, leaders' storytelling has ethical implications, in that it can oppress those whose narratives are not constructed by themselves. Business schools are teaching students to use storytelling persuasively, but it is unlikely they have instructed students in this its ethical dimension. Further, mindfulness has increasingly emerged in organizations, and central to its approach is the necessity to let go. How does one both embrace stories and let go of them and one's identity? This presentation will address these questions by considering what organizational existentialism has to offer. Kierkegaard's assertion that, "I must find a truth that is true for me" will be considered, especially in light of a post-truth sensibility. Participants will learn how to consider the ethical dimensions of storytelling, and will be provided with suggestions for negotiating both the divergent and convergent power of identity construction through this business practice so as to maintain organizational stability while fostering organizational change. Lastly, for those who are teaching their students persuasive storytelling, the presentation will provide advice on helping business students find their identities through stories then let them go, a practice consistent with mindfulness (Weick and Sutcliffe 2006)

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# **Nonverbal Contrast in the Contemporary Egalitarian Commercials: An Analysis of Popular Indian Advertisements**

**Swatantra, Indian Institute of Management –Indore**

**Abstract:** Advertising is considered as a marketing tool, a social actor and a cultural artefact (Dyer, 1982; Frith, 1995, Leiss et al. 1990). Advertisements do reflect our mind-set, accepted social norms and also influence their building procedure. That's why scholars like Fox (1994); Pollay (1986) and Kacen and Nelson (2002) compare them with both a creator and a mirror of the society.

Portrayal of gender roles in advertising is an important agent of socialization and influences thought pattern of the society. (Dyer, 1982; Bardhan, 1995) Portrayal of gender roles in print and television advertisements is one of the very effective ways of assessing society's attitude towards gender. (Milner and Higgs, 2004). Since earlier times, women are not favourably portrayed as their roles are defined quite narrowly. They are shown as subservient to men (Goffman, 1976; Belknap and Leonard, 1990; Kang, 1997; Bell and Milic, 2002).

## **Gender role in the Indian Advertisements**

Griffin et al. (1994) indicated that Indian magazine advertisements portrayed women in their traditional roles of house wives and mothers. Recent scholars like Dwivedy et al. (2009) have accepted that the change is there but quite slow or negligible. While some of the scholars like Das (2000) believe that women are still portrayed in stereotypical ways, the observations of others like Brosius (1991) (though in the context of other countries) seem equally apt in the Indian context too that there is an explicit change in the roles, but implicit roles are still the same.

Perhaps advertisers, in an effort to cater to the changing interests of clients, have started playing a safe game of engaging in "dual roles, role switching and role blending" (Elliott et al., 1993).

Dilemma in the mind of the advertisers whether to portray men and women in traditional roles or to depict them in modern and liberated roles. (Dwivedy et al., 2009) And brings us to explore the undercurrent messages in the contemporary Indian advertisements.

## **Research Gap and the current study**

The earlier studies have paid attention to the apparent roles played by the actors in advertisements. To gauge that most of the studies opted for quantitative methods and the variables explored were the roles played as announcer vs. listener, frequency on screen display, Advisor vs. advisee, indulgence in challenging vs. non-challenging roles, subservient vs. superior role. Other than these, settings of the advertisement like home vs office, roles played by characters personal vs. professional, dependence on the other character etc. have been counted and checked.

While these methods have done a good job of providing us a solid foundation to analyse gender depiction, with the changing times it is important to go beyond these variables. As the current study intends to discuss more of the implicit gender roles, the methodology chosen here is Content analysis of the five chosen advertisements. The criterion to select these advertisements is a simple yardstick of popularity in digital Indian world.

## **Findings and implications**

The undercurrent in the quoted five advertisements is interestingly as biased as it used to be in the earlier times. With the yardstick of earlier parameters, women have come a long way. They are projected in quite a powerful role of business tycoons or decision makers. But looks like in the process they have lost a lot on the personal and emotional front. Their identities and worth is still to be justified by the parameters set by their counterparts, i.e., men. The undercurrent in these advertisements allow us to see a metaphor of "travelers" in the "journey" of life. The point to be noticed is that whether women are allowed to hold the steering, if yes – at what cost? The current paper depicts that the cost is high and stakes are heavy.

# **Gamification in the College Classroom -Student Responses to Megapoint Opportunities**

**Gerald Plumlee, Jr., Southern Arkansas University**

**Abstract:** Many online or “smartphone” games today offer megapoint opportunities to users to earn large scores. Studies suggest that students perceive assignments worth more points to be more valuable or worth their time. The purpose of this study is to compare performance levels among students in courses with different grading point schemes. Recent findings on education gamification suggest that students are more responsive to classwork that is worth a larger set of points relative to smaller scale point systems.

Performance levels will be measured using both assigned grades for exams and assignments as well as submission/completion rates for assignments and quizzes. Courses observed will be split between small scale point systems (i.e. 500 points) and large scale point systems (i.e. 5,000 points) with each component worth the same overall percentage of a student’s grade. Courses included will vary across business disciplines.

The study is expected to take place over multiple semesters (2-3) to ensure a large and diverse data set. Five courses are selected for this study, with each course offering multiple sections in each semester included. Both online and face-to-face courses will be included in the sample to observe student behavior in various course settings. All students enrolled in these selected courses will be invited to participate in the study.

The course sections will proceed as normal but with varying grade point systems in which some are large scale (megapoints) and some are of a much smaller scale. Between course sections, however, each component (assignment, quiz, exam) will be worth the same overall percentage within the points, therefore there are no differences in grading schemes beyond the point scale system. At the end of the semester, grades and submission rates can be compared across course sections. Multiple courses are included to provide multiple observations for the point scale system dynamic.

Preliminary results from this study will be presented.

# **Self-Regulated Learning in a Graduate Business Communications Course: A Qualitative Inquiry**

**Catherine Flynn, Kaplan University**

**Joel Olson, Kaplan University**

**Michelle Reinhardt, Kaplan University**

**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to learn more about the student experience in an online self-paced environment featuring self-regulated learning. When queried about their six-week participation in the self-regulated environment, students commented on five key themes: course content, obstacles, self-paced delivery, support and feedback, and time and teams. Results from an earlier quantitative study on the pilot course produced unexpected results, prompting this second phase of research. This phenomenological study was designed to address the question “Why were student learning, course, and teaching measures lower than expected in the quantitative inquiry?”

The qualitative research revealed that student perception of a self-regulated learning environment is met with optimism and appreciation for flexibility, and yet parallel observations are characterized by frustration for personal shortcomings, including lack of focus, procrastination, and inability to maintain a steady commitment. Implications for teaching and learning in a self-regulated environment emerge, in addition to lessons learned for self-paced, independent curricular offerings in online environments. Finally, support for competency-based learning strategies is revealed.

The researchers’ expectation in the first phase analysis of the pilot course was that when students were given opportunity to direct the meta-cognitive variable that they would experience greater course satisfaction, improved learning outcomes, and a higher level of autonomy. Surprisingly, the study results indicated the opposite for this experiment – students in the control group showed a statistically significant difference, rating each of the measures higher than the pilot group. Both GPA and failure rates showed no statistical difference between the two groups, as anticipated. These results led the researchers to pursue the second phase of analysis, a qualitative evaluation of student comments about the course.

Qualitative data analysis played a vital role in the phase II research, demanding both rigor and flexibility. The research team considered a variety of commercial-off-the-shelf software weighing usability, flexibility, and cost. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) is prevalent, offering a variety of features. Consideration was given to NVivo, ATLAS.ti, and others. Final selection of web-based Coding Analysis Toolkit (CAT) software was made for the qualitative data analysis because of the tool’s usability, flexibility, and user-interface. The tool permitted increased organization and efficiency in sorting patterns and discerning themes in the datasets.

The CAT system has two modes: one includes uploading of coded results from ATLAS.ti into the system; the second permits users to upload a raw, uncoded data file to complete the coding function. Researchers opted for the second mode and uploaded 27 data sets containing a total of 236 discrete units for coding. The research team opted for sentence-level evaluation of the data sets with no more than 3 codes assigned to each unit. This mode permitted flexible options that would not have existed with ATLAS.ti alone.

CAT permits management of the coder accounts through its web-based system that tracks coding

process and quality. Comparison tools include both standard comparison and code-by-code comparison that uses the Kappa Tool. Inter-coder reliability was tested by running the Kappa at regular intervals during the coding process. A Kappa of .7 or higher was achieved before moving on to ensure valid coding among the coding team.

The role of the instructor emerged as a key theme in the study, providing indications of steps institutions can and should take to balance student autonomy and instructor support. Research in self-regulated learning concluded that course design, instructor, and dialogue are the strongest predictors of user satisfaction and learning outcomes. Instructor plays both formal and informal roles. Formally, instructors facilitate, evaluate, monitor, and review. In an informal role, faculty members serve in creating a learning environment that is characterized by trust and reciprocal concern.

While our study failed to establish a clear connection between student self-regulation and learning outcomes or satisfaction, the research did reveal that the support and influence of the instructor is necessary for improvement of learning outcomes and overall satisfaction. The combination of a self-regulated learning environment with students provided with flexibility and work-life balance and instructor support is the model that emerges from these studies. Instructors serve as the cornerstone of online education. Regular training and workshops to improve faculty skills and techniques are vital to ensuring faculty and maintaining the demands of the online environment. Competency-based learning models are supported by student desire for both flexibility and support.

# **Academic Persistence within Professional Communication Programs at Hispanic-Serving Institutions**

**Kenneth Robert Price, Texas A&M University -Kingsville**

## **Abstract: Introduction**

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are defined as colleges, universities, or systems/districts where total Hispanic enrollment constitutes a minimum of 25% of the total enrollment with at least 50 percent of those students being the first generation in their families to attend college. Many HSIs are mainstream institutions that have been transformed through demographic enrollment changes, especially in southern and southwestern states, where an expanding Hispanic population resides in large numbers. These areas of steep growth of Hispanic population makes HSIs an increasingly important set of local higher education providers. Despite the rapidly increasing number of Hispanic students entering postsecondary education in the past decade, the Hispanic student population remains vastly underrepresented in terms of the percentage of students both pursuing and attaining STEM degrees. Similarly, Hispanic students have been even more underrepresented in scientific and technical communication degrees.

The current trend of austerity in raising tuition and placing more of the financial burden for the cost of higher education on families is a challenge for many students who choose to attend HSIs. Moreover, historically, fewer financial resources have prevented many HSIs from being able to compete for the best faculty, upgrade and maintain facilities, establish or improve technological infrastructures, and fund large endowments. While the rising cost of a college education is beyond the purview of professional communication programs, the problems of student preparedness, engagement, and retention at HSIs are not.

## **Statement of the problem or purpose**

Exploring innovative or updated pedagogical practices for many of our common courses. Attendees will contribute to an important conversation about a rapidly growing student population that has historically been vastly underrepresented in scientific and technical communication programs, with student retention and success as the primary goals.

## **Methodology**

Based in part upon success in other disciplines, possible solutions to these problems include the following:

How an institution deploys its resources, curricula, learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in educationally purposeful activities directly correlates to successful student retention.

Seminars, learning communities, and developmental advising have a surprisingly huge influence on student engagement and retention.

Strong engagement indicators include student-to-faculty contact, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, and respect for diversity.

Other possible means to engage and retain students include a gateway seminar course, peer mentoring with upper-division students, student clubs similar to student chapters of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), and experiential learning that has the students representing the program to external constituents beyond a single internship or coop capstone course.

Bridge programs assist in the readiness of first-generation college students.

Most important, if professional communication programs at HSIs want their students to persist, they must offer opportunities and assistance to engage them early and often, not just at the end of their academic course work.

# **The Roles of Foreign Language in Business Administration**

**Kalu Bernard Orji, Adeyemi College of Education Ondo**

**Claudia Anne Kalil, University of Cape Town**

**Abstract:** Language is a vital tool that we use to communicate with other people in our daily and working lives (Sanstead, 2001; Adejimola, 2008). It consists of words and meanings that are combined into discrete units (sentences) (Hagoort & Van Berkum, 2007; Van Berkum, 2008). Sentences joined together become information that can be used to exchange ideas with other people (Lieberman, 2008). Although language is important in working life, linguistic skill in itself is insufficient (Cantoni, 1998; Geneva 2002; Hulstrand, 2008). Foreign languages are also important and play important roles in business administration. In business administration, foreign language plays several roles, such as a role in internal (Marchan et al., 1997; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999; Davies, 2000) and external communication (Marchan et al., 1997; Davies, 2000; Leslie & Russel, 2006), a role in having a chance to get a good job, and a role as a means to understand other cultures. Good communication in foreign language becomes so crucial in today's world (Cole, 1988) owing to the impact of globalization. For global competitors, the most important factor is the ability to communicate on a wider, quicker and clearer basis (Schorr, 2005). Ability in communication is focused on foreign languages which are widely used (Walters, 1990). The importance of the roles of foreign language in business administration is for communication with customers, competitors, employers, employees and colleagues (GO, 2009). In fact, communication begins early in life as we can see the fact that the baby has a need is communicated by a simple cry (Ruffin, n.d.). As children grow older, the communication process becomes more complex (Stewart, 1985). Communication is very important in the business field in terms of sending messages to receivers or speaking clearly to listeners. Foreign language ability also plays very important roles in business administration in helping increase the opportunities for understanding and in learning other cultures (Griva & Sivropoulou, 2009).



# **Going for (the) Broke: Assembling an Open Educational Resources Textbook Equivalent for Business Communications**

**Craig Rinne, Florida Atlantic University**

## **Abstract: Purpose**

To present the process of creating and testing an open educational resources (OER) textbook equivalent for undergraduate business communications at Florida Atlantic University

## **Findings**

Final findings will be completed in Summer of 2018, with the following schedule:

Initial curation of possible OER texts occurred in Summer 2017. Two test sections using OER texts (without a traditional textbook) are being taught in Fall 2017 (students will be surveyed for feedback on the OER texts). Expanded testing will occur in Spring 2018, with a final departmental decision in Summer 2018.

## **Summary**

At the 2017 ABC Western Regional conference in Orem, Utah, I attended an eye-opening presentation by Marianna Richardson, Andy Spackman, and Kurt Sandholtz, who explained how Brigham Young University was currently creating and publishing their own online textbook for business communication, an open educational resource (OER) that would be free for students (donations would probably be requested but not required). They opened their presentation with startling information about how rapidly textbook costs have risen (outstripping medical care costs) and how increasing numbers of students are in turn not purchasing, let alone reading, required textbooks.

This presentation, coupled with my similar anecdotal evidence of students not purchasing and/or reading textbooks, inspired me to begin researching OERs, which, broadly speaking, are considered to be any freely available online resource, many of which have "Creative Commons" licenses that allow for use and modification of the resource (with appropriate citation, of course). My department, Business Communications at Florida Atlantic University, then decided to experiment with creating an OER "textbook equivalent" for our undergraduate business communications course.

Our goal is to receive suggestions for texts from all our instructors and our reference librarians, assemble those texts in an organic archive, and then create a standard course template on which instructors can base their courses, while also choosing from other texts in the ever-growing organic archive.

My paper will describe and analyze our process of creating an OER textbook equivalent, describing and addressing such issues and questions as:

- Initial curation of possible texts aided by our campus reference librarians
- Selection of a core OER textbook as a fallback option
- Continuing faculty selection and addition of other online OER resources
- Creating a shared website for the organic archive so instructors can submit OER texts
- Committee work to determine the standard course template
- Surveying students in the test sections for their use of and reaction to an OER textbook equivalent
- Advantages and disadvantages of editing a Creative Commons text
- Evaluating the differences between a traditional textbook and an OER equivalent

My presentation will also include an explanation of how the push for OER textbook equivalents is occurring at the state level in Florida. Results of the student surveys of the OER texts will also be presented.

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# **Continuous Improvement through the Assessment Process in a Business Communication Course: A Ten-Year Journey**

**Carol S. Wright, Stephen F. Austin State University**

**Marsha L. Bayless, Stephen F. Austin State University**

**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to examine the assessment process and outcomes of the basic Business Communication course over a ten-year period at an AACSB-accredited regional university. Assessment has been a rocky road with changing guidelines from various entities such as the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, and the University Assessment Committee. The findings indicated a long process of revising procedures and techniques in an attempt to improve the course for better student learning. A summary of the process discusses the major outcomes of assessment.

# **The Effect of Case Studies on Students' Audience Awareness**

**Danica L. Schieber, Sam Houston State University**

**Vincent Robles, University of North Texas**

**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to analyze the effects of case studies on students' audience awareness when they write various types of common business messages. We were interested in how the students responded to their audiences for the various messages they were asked to write in their business communication course. While many instructors and researchers employ the use of reflection to promote metacognition in their classrooms (Brookfield, 1995; Barrett, 2011; Cambridge, 2010; Mezirow, 1990; Yancey, 1998), this presentation details the first part of a two-part project, specifically the qualitative analysis of the reflections students composed after completing the messages packet assignment.

Students in two business communication classes were asked to write an assignment (the messages packet). This case study assignment detailed different audiences that students needed to write to. They wrote an informative message to a peer, a positive message to a client, a bad news message to a client, a persuasive message to their superior, and an inter-office informative memo. The students needed to be able to clearly analyze what each of those audience members needed to know.

For this qualitative analysis part of the study, the researchers used Grounded Theory (Corbin and Strauss 1995) to analyze the student reflections. Each reflection was carefully analyzed, and themes were extrapolated from the data, by the use of open coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined open coding as the "analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data" (p. 101). As similarities emerged, they were then documented and analyzed.

Preliminary findings show that one of the most difficult pieces of the assignment to write (according to student reflections) was the negative message. Students found it incredibly difficult to give their audience bad news.

Another finding was the difference in the types of responses that students gave on their reflections. The differences between the various types of student responses will be discussed, as well as implications for business communication instructors.

While students may struggle writing business communication for different audiences when they first begin, the opportunity for students to practice with cases helps students to better understand audience analysis.

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# **The Influence of Coloring Mandalas on Students' Communication Anxiety**

**Leslie Ramos Salazar, West Texas A&M University**

**Abstract:** A common communication issue in business and oral communication courses is students' anxiety or communication apprehension. McCroskey (1997) defined communication apprehension or anxiety as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety experienced, associated with either real or imaged communication with another person or persons." Communication anxiety can negatively influence students' academic performance and success in public, group, and interpersonal interactions (McCroskey, 1997; 1978). Also, students with high communication anxiety (CA) may be judged poorly in job interviews, which can negatively impact their career potential upon graduation (Ayres, Keereetaweek, Pao-En, & Edwards, 1998). However, students who are able to manage their anxiety effectively are more likely to speak with competence across contexts (Fordham & Gabbin, 1996). Often times, instructors of business and oral communication courses experience students with varying degrees of communication anxiety, especially during public or group presentations. Instructors who adopt effective exercises and activities to reduce their students' apprehension may empower students to cope with their speaking anxieties in their personal and professional lives (McCroskey, 1997).

Previously, researchers have examined several traditional strategies to alleviate or cope with speaker's anxiety such as the use of cognitive restructuring and visualization (Kraye, O'Hair, O'Hair, & Furio, 1984; Choi, Honeycutt, & Bodie, 2015). Yet, recent innovative research has been adopting the use of coloring pre-drawn mandalas, or circles that represent the wholeness of the universe in Buddhism and Hinduism to heal emotional and psychological traumas (Violatti, 2013). Psychotherapists including Carl Jung adopted the use of drawing and coloring mandalas to calm patients who experienced psychological pain or anxiety during therapy (Jung, 1973). A series of empirical experimental studies have integrated Jung's (1973) mandala coloring method to heal anxiety (Curry & Kasser, 2005), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Henderson, Rosen, & Mascaro, 2007), and depression (Palmer, Dowrick, & Gunn, 2014). Studies have found evidence that coloring pre-drawn mandalas has a healing effect on individuals' emotional moods and emotional well-being (Kersten & van der Venet, 2010; Sandmire et al., 2012; Muthard & Gilbertson, 2016). Previously, however, no study has examined the potential impact of coloring mandalas on students who experience communication apprehension or speaker's anxiety. Therefore, the purpose of this study is trifold. First, to explore whether mandalas reduce students' communication anxiety in group, meeting, interpersonal, and public speaking contexts. Second, to explore whether mandala coloring is a more effective approach to reducing students' communication anxiety in comparison to free doodling. Third, to explore sex differences in communication anxiety after the completion of a mandala coloring activity.

Participants included 48 undergraduate students (22 women and 26 men) enrolled in communication courses in a public Midwestern university. Participants were aged between 16 to 21 years of age with a mean of 18. The sample consisted of 25 Caucasian, 12 Hispanic, 7 African-American, and 4 Other/Mixed. The sample included 20 Freshman, 5 Sophomore, and 4 Junior students. This experiment was nonrandom including two communication courses (control (n = 24) vs. experimental (n = 24)). Upon signing the informed consent forms, participants agreed to complete a questionnaire with demographic information including the PRCA-24, and two separate activities. After participants completed their demographic information, they completed the PRCA-24, and then communication anxiety was induced with a 4-minute written activity recalling a moment of high communication anxiety. Afterward, students completed an anxiety measure. Then,

participants completed an activity depending on their condition. Participants in the experimental condition were provided with pre-drawn mandalas and they were instructed to color them with colored pencils for a total of 8 minutes. Then, participants completed the PRCA-24. On the other hand, participants in the control condition were provided with a blank sheet of paper with color pencils and they were told to doodle freely for a total of 8 minutes. Then, participants completed the PRCA-24.

To examine the aims of this study, independent sample t-tests and paired t-tests were conducted using SPSS 22.0. Paired sample t-tests revealed no differences in the PRCA prior to the condition activity, which suggest that the initial PRCA-24 anxiety was comparable across conditions. T-tests revealed differences in the pre-PRCA and post-PRCA in the doodle and the experimental condition, which demonstrated that the activities reduced the general communication anxiety in both conditions. However, when comparing the pre-test and post-test PRCA-24 in the free doodling condition, the anxiety levels were slightly reduced in group and meeting settings, but not in public speaking or interpersonal settings. Interestingly, when comparing the pre-test and post-test PRCA-24 in the experimental condition (mandala coloring) the anxiety levels were reduced in group, meeting, and public speaking settings, but not in interpersonal settings. In addition, group communication anxiety yielded a significant difference among the control (free doodling) and experimental condition (mandala coloring). Lastly, independent-sample t-tests did not find sex differences in the pre-PRCA or the post-PRCA in the control or experimental conditions.

Several implications can be derived from this exploratory study in business communication courses. First, given that students may experience speaker's anxiety during business communication courses such as group presentations, work meetings, and course speeches, instructors may integrate a mandala coloring activity to reduce students' anxieties prior to major oral or group presentations. Second, mandala coloring may facilitate students' interaction in groups, which can lead to positive engagement from apprehensive students in group-based assignments. Third, if instructors enable students to take the PRCA-24 measure in their classrooms along with the mandala coloring activity as a course exercise, anxious students may learn that they can play an efficacious role in reducing their own oral communication anxieties. Generally, these implications can guide instructors in alleviating students' speaking anxieties in business and oral communication courses.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored the effectiveness of mandala coloring on students' communication anxiety. This study found that coloring mandalas reduced students' communication anxiety in group, meeting, and public speaking contexts. Also, coloring mandalas was more effective at reducing group anxiety in comparison to free doodling. Overall, the findings from this communication study may nurture future research in the role of mandala coloring in the reduction of students' communication anxiety in business communication and oral communication courses.

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# **When in Doubt, Cite: Activities and Assignments for Teaching the Rules of APA**

**Marcel Marie Robles, Eastern Kentucky University**

**Billy Ackerman, Eastern Kentucky University**

**Abstract:** Evidence of referencing can be seen as early as Third Century B.C. in the works of Aristotle. His writings comprised over 2,000 pages with approximately one reference for every two pages, including self-citations referencing his previous work. Sir Isaac Newton also prioritized ownership during the 17th Century beginnings of scholarly journals and intellectual possession. Newton even found himself debating with colleagues over idea origination. Similarly, Lavoisier, in the 18th Century, referenced others' works for both supporting and discerning his hypotheses (Small, 2010). By the time Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859, citing other authors had been formalized into a footnote system; however, Darwin did not reference a single source in this publication (Small, 2010).

Four purposes of citations, according to Martin (2016), included (1) to support an argument; (2) to indicate the most important and useful studies in the field; (3) to acknowledge sources of ideas, methods, or quotations; and (4) to impress readers, referees, and editors. Connelly (2016) affirmed that references should connect the research topic to previous research to provide support, critical thinking (e.g., evidence-based, essential), and intellectual standards (e.g., accuracy, currency). Camacho (2012) added that "in business, as in all disciplines, documenting sources is not only an issue of ethics and legality, but also an issue of credibility" (p. 50). Quoting Kouzes and Posner (as cited in Camacho, 2012, p. 50), Camacho stated that "you are much more likely to believe the message if you believe the messenger."

References should predominantly include evidence-based research. Oren and Watson (2009, p. 200) surmised that "citing previously published work to support current investigations is one of the foundations of ... literature. It places an article in a context, builds on prior work, establishes credibility, and leads readers to additional resources on the topic." References must be correct, and the reader should be able to easily locate the cited sources within the reference list. References should only be included when they add-to or support the understanding of the current topic (Connelly, 2016). The referenced material should be cited appropriately within the manuscript (Connelly, 2016). According to APA Style (2009), any idea or research that originated from the text of an article or a book (or from the author's own work) must be cited accurately. The final responsibility of authenticating the citation and confirming the credibility stands with the author(s) (Oren & Watson, 2009; Unver, Senduran, Kocak, Gunal, & Karatosun, 2009). In other words, when in doubt, cite. Furthermore, the author should have read and understood the writings of all references and citations (Lilien, 2008; Wright & Armstrong, 2008).

Therefore, college students should learn and use APA skills within the social science of business. This presentation demonstrates class activities and assignments using APA Style. Methods of teaching specific APA rules will also be shared to assure student learning.

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# **Making the Most of Limited Time: Using Focus Tools to Improve Grammar, Mechanics, and Style**

**Kathryn O'Neill, Sam Houston State University**

**Geraldine E. Hynes, Sam Houston State University**

**Abstract:** Both academics and business people agree that the ability to write clearly and correctly is essential for students as they enter the workforce. Research by universities and employers supports the importance and value of effective writing (Addams & Allred, 2015; Herk, 2015). Employers have identified workplace writing ability as a “threshold skill” for hiring and promotion for professional employees (College Board, 2004). Surveys routinely demonstrate that ability to write well ranks high on lists of critical skills that college graduates need and employers seek (AACSB International, 2006; College Board, 2004; Ghannadian, 2013; Herk, 2015; NACE, 2017; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009, 2011).

Our task, as business communication educators, is to develop and improve students’ writing skills, and employers expect to find an acceptable skill level at the point of hire. However, studies also routinely find a gap between expectation and reality for employers. For example, a study by the American Association of Colleges and Universities found that only 27 percent of employers believe recent college graduates are prepared for the workplace in the area of written communication (Hart Research Associates, 2015). The same study found that recent graduates over-estimate their career preparation in written communication as compared to employers, with 65 percent of student participants rating themselves as well-prepared in written communication skills.

Though abilities in editing and revising are surely a part of this gap, a glaring demonstration of deficits in writing ability is the frequency of errors in grammar, mechanics, and style. Because time is at a premium during a semester’s work on business writing, opportunities for basic instruction and repeated drill are scarce. Additionally, a document covered with critical comments can be discouraging.

This presentation offers two strategies anchored in research that instructors can use to narrow the field and thus to enable both instructor and student to make progress in improving writing quality.

## **Strategy #1: Focus on Errors that Matter to a Business Audience**

We derived the set of errors from a series of studies that asked business professionals to react to sentence-level errors. Each study found that errors do bother business professionals and some errors are more bothersome than others. Hairston (1981) classified errors into three categories: status-marking, very serious, and serious. A “status-marking” error will mark the writer, in the reader’s eyes, as belonging to a lower social status (Hairston, 1981; Noguchi, 1991). Sigmar and Austin (2013) and Gray and Heuser (2003) found, too, that these three categories of errors were some of the most bothersome to professionals.

## **Strategy #2: Focus on the Most Frequently Made Errors**

Grading many papers over several semesters led me to several observations. First, few students make frequent errors in all the categories: status marking, very serious and serious. Most students make just a few grammar, mechanics and style errors, though they make them frequently and consistently. For some students, the problem area is commas, while, for others, the problem might

be sentence errors or spelling. Second, this first observation reminds us of a statistical tool often used in quality analysis, the Pareto Principle, also known as the 80-20 rule, which could prove useful in motivating students to improve their work. Pareto analysis identifies “the vital few” as a focus for action and recommendations (Baudin, 2012). We applied the analysis to four classes’ worth of writing assignments to identify a “vital few” errors as a focus for practice, instruction, and feedback (O’Neill, in press).

This presentation will describe the research foundations instructors can use to focus attention for grammar and mechanics instruction and feedback, and will present examples from the instructors’ classroom practice.

Reference list available upon request.

# **Managerial Communication and Employee Job Satisfaction during Times of Organizational Change within the Healthcare Industry**

**Ashley Hall, Stephen F, Austin State University**

**Abstract:** Change is rampant in today's business environment. The healthcare field has been especially impacted by recent changes such as the Affordable Healthcare Act, the rise of electronic healthcare records, and pressures to cut costs and improve care. Given the volatile work conditions, quality managerial communication is essential. This study investigated the relationship between managerial communication and employee job satisfaction during times of organizational change among healthcare workers. Because individual differences impact the effectiveness of communication, audience analysis is essential (Lehman & DuFrene, 2017). As such, three individual employee attributes were tested as moderators – organizational trust, managerial trust, and openness to change.

## **Methodology**

Four hypotheses were tested in this study –

H1: Within healthcare organizations, there is a positive relationship between managerial communication and employee job satisfaction during organizational change.

H2: Among healthcare workers, organizational trust plays a moderating role on the positive relationship between managerial communication and employee job satisfaction during times of organizational change, with a stronger relationship existing when the employee reports high levels of organizational trust.

H3: Among healthcare workers, managerial trust plays a moderating role on the positive relationship between managerial communication and employee job satisfaction during times of organizational change, with a stronger relationship existing when the employee reports high levels of managerial trust.

H4: Among healthcare workers, openness to change plays a moderating role on the positive relationship between managerial communication and employee job satisfaction during times of organizational change, with a stronger relationship existing when the employee reports high levels of openness to change.

A cross-sectional survey design was employed for this study. To measure an employee's self-reported level of job satisfaction, Camman, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh's (1983) job satisfaction scale was used. To measure the employee's perception of his or her manager's communication during times of organizational change, two scales were used – the Quality of Information scale (Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994; Miller & Monge, 1985) and NETMA, "No one ever tells me anything," (Miller et al., 1994; based on Peters & Waterman, 1982). Nyhan and Marlowe's (1997) Organizational Trust Inventory was used to measure both managerial and organizational trust as it includes questions pertaining to both. Miller et al.'s (1994) Openness Toward Change scale was slightly modified for use in this research study.

Students enrolled in business and human resource development master's and PhD programs at three regional universities in the southern part of the United States constituted the convenience sample, so participants were recruited from multiple healthcare organizations.

## Findings

Completed surveys were received from 153 participants who worked in the healthcare industry and indicated that they had experienced moderate or large-scale change efforts at work in the previous six months. A majority of respondents were female (76.5%) and worked full-time (97.4%). There was diversity in the organizational tenure and job level of the respondents.

To test H1, a regression was performed. The results indicated a R<sup>2</sup> value of .279 that was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). As a result, H1 is supported.

Multiple hierarchical regression was used to test hypotheses H2, H3, and H4. The R<sup>2</sup> value of .472 ( $p < .05$ ) means that H2 was supported. H3 had a nonsignificant R<sup>2</sup> value ( $p = .156$ ), so it was not supported. When H4 was tested, the R<sup>2</sup> value was not significant ( $p = .375$ ), so the hypothesis was not supported.

## Summary

Organizational change is commonplace today, and the healthcare industry is not immune to the volatility. This study investigated the relationship between managerial communication and employee job satisfaction during times of organizational change among healthcare workers. In addition, three individual attributes (organizational trust, managerial trust, and openness to change) were tested as moderators. The only hypotheses supported in this study were H1 and H2.

## Implications for business and education

It is important that managers understand the connection between communication and job satisfaction due to the frequency of organizational change efforts taking place. Managers should prioritize increasing both the amount and quality of their communication with subordinates during periods of change, as doing so can help better prepare employees for changes. Also relevant is the organization's communication culture. Organizations can help establish effective communication practices by encouraging managers to pass quality information on to subordinates in a timely manner.

This study's findings have important takeaways for educators as well. Many of the practical implications for organizations can be incorporated into the classroom in an effort to better prepare students for the ever-changing workplace, in addition to building their communication skills as future managers.

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# **Integrating the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Framework as a Route to Job Preparedness in the Communications Industry**

**Kayla Sapkota, University of Arkansas -Little Rock**

**Abstract:** In recent years, technology has become a central focus of how we communicate, both personally and professionally. In spite of the importance of understanding and mastery of technology-based communications channels, it is important to not stray far from foundational communications skills, such as proper grammar and punctuation, public speaking, and targeted messaging. Research suggests that today's jobs require employees who are versed in both traditional and technological communications means (non-technology-based and technology-based). In a study of skills desired by employers, Conrad and Newberry (2012), for example, found that, indeed, employers desired strong technology skills but that they placed greater value on foundational communication skills, such as written communication, oral communication, leadership communication, team skills, listening skills, presentation skills, global/cultural awareness, and interpersonal communication. Likewise, Velasco (2012) found that interpersonal and team work skills were important among employers of 200 recent business graduates; intuitively, interpersonal and team work skills require a reasonable amount of effective communications skills in order to complete the task(s) at hand.

While originally a framework designed for the K-12 learning environment, the 21st Century Skills Model has a meaningful application in the college and university setting. The model's focus on (1) learning and innovation skills, (2) information, media, and technology skills, and (3) life and career skills especially helps to guide curriculum-planning to equip business graduates with the modern day skills needed in the workplace.

This study illustrates the 21st Century Skills framework's compatibility with job market requirements for communications-heavy industries. Via a review of necessary job skills and abilities in communications-related positions, evidence is presented that supports using the 21st Century Skills Framework as an effective guide for preparing the college graduate for work in the communications field.

Data were collected via job postings on LinkedIn's Job Search tool. The Job Search feature allows a user to filter all posted jobs based on date posted, company, experience level, location, function, and industry. The decision-rules utilized in the search for this study are included in Table 1.

Table 1

## **Decision Rules for LinkedIn Job Postings**

1. Search term: Communications
2. Date posted: Last 24 hours
3. Company: All
4. Experience Level: Entry level
5. Location: United States
6. Job function: marketing

The search yielded 164 results. Of those results, 144 of the postings were unique and valid; of the invalid postings, one led to an error page, while the other 19 constituted duplicates. The 144 postings were captured in PDF format and imported into QSR International's NVivo Pro qualitative analysis software. The postings were reviewed utilizing word frequency and content analyses tools within NVivo Pro. The results were considered within the context of the 21st Century Skills Model from the lens of curriculum development with regards to business communication. Specific findings included a heavy focus on mastery of multiple communications channels, audience targeting, relationships, foundational communications skills (i.e. writing, speaking, and appropriate message content), and teamwork. These findings supported the use of the 21st Century Skills Framework in

the university communications curriculum. Discussion was made concerning the most pervasive framework components and ways that these elements may be addressed in the college classroom.



# Make Room for Generation Z

Debbie D. DuFrene, Stephen F. Austin State University

**Abstract:** Gen Z, Centennials, and iGen are current labels for those born 1996 to present. Gen Z seems the most popular label, though generation names often change as a generation comes of age and different characteristic or events come to define them. Gen Y, for instance, morphed into millennials. According to research, Gen Z is more individualistic and possibly the most conservative generation since World War II. A UK study of attitudes of adults to a variety of social issues found that Gen Z respondents described their views as “conservative” to “moderate.” This is a phenomenal change from the 83% of Millennials and 85% of Gen X who state their views were “quite” or “very liberal” on those same issues (Stahl, 2017).

Gen Z doesn’t know a time with the Internet. They largely avoid TV shows and movies, consuming their entertainment and news from their phones and computers. According to a recent study, they also tend to be more pessimistic than their Millennial predecessors, with more than 70% (as compared to 60% of Millennials) seeing their lives getting more challenging in the future (Kane, 2017). Early indicators about Gen Z members are that they are self-aware, self-reliant, innovative, and goal-oriented. A recent study of Gen Z members revealed some other interesting facts about this young generation (Center, 2016):

- They are the technology trend-setters and offer insightful glimpses into the future of communication, banking and investing, shopping, learning, voting, and working.
- They selected Vine, Instagram, and Twitter as their top three social media sites. Facebook didn’t even make their top five, though they did indicate that it is good for all ages (Center).
- They aren’t worried about online privacy and are comfortable using mobile apps.
- They have a dismal view of the state of the country. Only about a fourth say they can trust elected officials and that the country and its economy is headed in the right direction.
- They don’t want to be like Millennials. They are more practical, having been raised in the aftermath of the US recession. In many ways, this group thinks and acts more like Boomers than Millennials.

Members of Gen Z Educators must understand the characteristics and motivation of Gen Z students if they are to reach them effectively and help to prepare them for employment (Beall, 2016):

- They live in a world of continuous updates and processes information faster than other generations due to apps such as Snapchat and Vine. As a result, their attention spans may be significantly lower than that of Millennials.
- They can quickly and efficiently shift between work and play, with multiple distractions.
- Employment sources are predicting that more members of GenZ will go directly into the workforce, opting out of traditional educational routes.
- They desire independent work environments and favor entrepreneurial employment.
- They have high expectations for quickness and reliability.
- They can’t be without their phones and devices; TV is a secondary interest.
- Inclusiveness and global thinking means that Gen Z is less patriotic.

As a result of their growing up experiences, Gen Z has different learning style preferences from previous generations. While they are very motivated by DIYL (do-it-yourself-learning), they also embrace peer-to-peer learning. They enjoy participating in the co-construction of knowledge and their educational content (Malat, 2016). Unlike Millennials, who pursue personal fulfillment more widely than financial goals or job titles, Gen Z values college most as a means to secure a good job. Studies indicate that Gen Z members expect to be mentored by superiors and desire good working relationships. They exhibit a strong need for job security, though many are willing to take risk on entrepreneurial endeavors (Iorgulescu, 2016).

As Gen Z students continue to fill college classrooms, it is of paramount importance that educators realize their unique preferences and expectations.

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# **An Examination of the Effect of Collaborative Technologies on Team Development and Function**

**Traci Austin, Sam Houston State University**

**Lucia Sigmar, Sam Houston State University**

**Abstract:** One of the major challenges in asynchronous online environments is adapting technologies to the requirements of the course. One particularly problematic assignment is collaborative presentations. In both graduate and undergraduate business or managerial communication courses, team informative or persuasive presentations are commonly required. Face-to-face students encounter a host of challenges in forming teams and creating quality collaborative content; online students, however, face even more. Many online students are not on campus, or not even in the same city or state or country. How then can online students collaborate effectively with each other to create a business presentation?

## **Background**

Teamwork and collaboration are among the most important skills an employee can possess (American Management Association, 2012). In the authors' face-to-face business and managerial communication courses, team presentations involve the following:

- Well-designed visual aids that supplement the presentation content
- 3-5 students who engage with the audience nonverbally and verbally
- Smooth verbal transitions between slides and speakers
- Consistency in oral delivery and appropriateness of slide design
- A robust and well-documented team process for creating content and ensuring the quality and timeliness of individual student contributions

The face-to-face versions of the authors' courses have activities and assignments in place—many of which have been refined through years of practice and application—that make the above student learning outcomes possible. These activities, however, are difficult to replicate in an online course. In addition, the temptation to simply copy the face-to-face course in this new online world can lead instructors to ignore the unique advantages of the virtual environment. In a final layer of complexity, university administration and assessment organizations often require that the student learning experience is “consistent” across both face-to-face and online platforms—though they often provide little guidance as to how that consistency is to be defined. To address this multitude of issues and pressures, instructors must think creatively and strategically; one promising source of solutions lies in new and emerging technologies.

In recent years, technology has seen major changes that inform the online educational environment and the business environment in which our students (we hope) will eventually work. In an effort make a more robust learning environment for online students, the authors investigated two such technologies—VoiceThread and Office Mix—which they felt would echo the experience enjoyed by face-to-face students in a presentation context. To be effective, the technologies needed to be flexible enough to be used by all members of the group in creating their presentation and incorporating multi-modal components that would lead to a professional product.

VoiceThread (VT) is an interactive platform that allows students to add voice, text, or video comments to images and documents. VT can be fully integrated into Blackboard, so students can seamlessly create content, and instructors can assist in the creation process and evaluate the results. While VT is most commonly used as an audio or video “discussion board,” its functions can be used to replicate at least some of the features required of team business presentations in the authors' courses.

Office Mix is a free add-in for Microsoft PowerPoint that allows for the insertion of advance audio, video, and digital ink functions as well as surveys, quizzes, and other interactive apps. The resulting

presentations can be turned into continuous-play MP4 and WMV videos. While primarily promoted as an eLearning tool, some of Office Mix's features can also be adapted for use in business presentations as defined in the authors' courses.

These two technologies were implemented in graduate and undergraduate business communication courses in the 2017-18 academic year. The goal of using the technologies was twofold: to build immediacy within teams and to communicate sales or informative presentations on business topics. Each platform offered a unique set of advantages and disadvantages, and they addressed the goals of the assignments with varying degrees of success. This presentation discusses the pitfalls and benefits of using these technologies in the business communication classroom.

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# **Improving Perceived Career Readiness: Student Responses to Service-Learning Projects in Business Courses**

**Ashly Smith, Sam Houston State University**

**Mary Funck, Sam Houston State University**

**Abstract:** Business scholars and business communication researchers have promoted the use of service-learning projects across the business disciplines with increasing prominence over the past 30-40 years. Service-learning describes projects and curricula that aim to provide students an opportunity to work with a community partner—such as a business or organization—on a project that involves the application of course concepts to address an issue for the partner. Service-learning projects are often lauded for their ability engage students in applying theoretical concepts, as well as their “realistic” nature (Zlotkowski, 1996; Littlefield, 2006; Cyphert, 2006; Govekar & Rishi, 2007; Godfrey, Illes & Berry, 2005; Wakefield & Sissom, 2013).

Service-learning projects meet the highest levels of learning identified in Bloom’s Taxonomy (Wakefield & Sissom, 2013). These objectives are achieved through successful service-learning projects because such projects engage students in each element of Kolb’s Learning Cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Wozniak, Bellah, & Riley, 2016). In addition, when clearly articulated, service-learning projects can help students to internalize desired attitudes and values regarding business culture as well as community and service (Steiner & Watson, 2006). Essentially, service-learning engages students in the most effective learning practices and helps them fully comprehend and make use of the business curricula content. In addition, for business educators, service-learning projects address two prominent critiques of B-School curricula: 1) the teaching of functional knowledge and skills that privileges financial “bottom lines” over moral and ethical decision-making (Godfrey, Illes, & Berry, 2005; McCord, Houseworth, & Michaelsen, 2015; Ocampo-Gómez & Ortega-Guerrero, 2013) and 2) the claim that business education curricula is typically silo-ed with little emphasis on cross-disciplinary knowledge and ability (Godfrey, Illes, & Berry, 2005).

Overall, the research on service-learning in business courses shows that there can be significant, positive, and useful results on students’ understanding of and ability to use course concepts as well as implied positive development of the students’ ethical approach. However, researchers have not discussed in as much depth how completing a service learning project affects students’ perceptions of the importance of civic engagement for business professionals nor the how completing such a project affects the students’ perceptions of their own career preparedness.

This presentation reports on the results of pre- and post-survey data and written reflection data from students who completed a semester-long service learning project through which they developed a developmental recreational retreat for military veterans. At the inception and completion of the project, students completed a 10-question, Likert scale survey about their attitudes toward service-learning projects as well as their perceived understanding of the served population (military veterans). In addition, after completing the project, students submitted a written reflection in response to prompts that asked students to respond to two sets of questions developed by the instructor. The first set of questions asked students to discuss with supporting details how their work on the project influenced their understanding of the value of business-community relationships and the value of being a civically-engaged business professional. In addition, this section asked if and how the project influenced their understanding of the served population, current and former military personnel. The second set of questions asked students to discuss the extent to which the project helped them to develop their business skills and

marketability when seeking a new job.

This presentation will present the results of the survey and reflection data, focusing on how service learning projects improve students' competencies in various business disciplines including business writing, improve their perception of the value of civic engagement for business professionals, and their perceived improved career readiness aspects after completing the project. Attendees will gain insight into the development and value of service-learning projects that have high value for students, especially after the project has been completed.

# **Downward Relational Maintenance in the Workplace**

**Kevin Sager, University of Alaska –Fairbanks**

**Abstract:** The notion of relational maintenance implies the necessity of investing time and energy into a relationship in order to promote and sustain a desired degree of connection to the other interactant. The topic of relational maintenance often appears in textbooks on interpersonal communication. Yet, sustaining healthy and adaptive relationships in the workplace is also oftentimes critical to organizational success. Envisioning workplace relationships as socially constructed and dynamic patterns of interaction foregrounds the influence that vertical messages can potentially have on organizational interactants. In recent years, organizational scholars have devoted increasing attention to relational maintenance enacted between supervisors and their employees. Nevertheless, the majority of this research has focused on what is known as upward (i.e., from employee to supervisor) relational maintenance tactics. Taking the perspective of the supervisor, this presentation will inform the audience of a range of downward relational maintenance tactics. In addition to presenting a typology of downward maintenance tactics, the presentation will also detail the results of a recent study on antecedents to the production of downward relational messages. A range of antecedents will be discussed, including demographic variables and individual difference variables. To avoid oversimplification of the complex process of message encoding, the proportion of variance explained by the various antecedent variables will also be reported. Finally, the implications of the findings for organizational practitioners and researchers will be shared with the audience.

# **Conflating Leadership: The Role of Age and Experience on Perceptions of Leadership**

**Jon M. Croghan, Northwestern State University**

**Tammy L. Croghan, Northwestern State University**

**Reagan Escude, Northwestern State University**

**Dalton Boyd, Northwestern State University**

**Abstract:** Leadership is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, multidisciplinary construct which has been written about and discussed in diverse contexts since the beginning of recorded history. Many classical and contemporary scholars have sought to define wisdom, but a precise definition has proven elusive; leading to a bevy of leadership theories that attempt to fill void (e.g., Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Clear Leadership, Participative Leadership). While all these theories illuminate aspects of leadership, they obscure or minimize others. Since leadership research has devolved into disparate theoretical camps that argue for the superiority of their own research.

This study seeks to clarify the basic characteristics of good leaders and the role of the age and experience of respondents on the specificity and diversity of their conceptions of leaders. The discussion considers how age and experience impacted our current understanding of leadership. Conclusions about the elusive nature of leadership and directions for future research are posited.

## **Goals:**

This study assessed a small sample's perception of characteristics of a good leader. The underlying research question posited for this project arises from the question "what role does age and/or experience play on perceived characteristics of good leaders?" While not specific to leadership, research on aging stereotypes and social mobility suggests that young individuals and older individuals, in general, have differential levels of classifications for existing phenomenon (Heckhausen, Dixon & Baltes, 1989; Hummert 1990; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner & Strahm, 1994; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner & Strahm, 1995; Hummert, Shaner & Garstka, 1995; Hummert, Shaner, Garstka & Henry, 1998).

## **Methodology:**

**Participants:** This study consisted of two parts: the focus group and questionnaire respondents. The focus group consisted of 5 individuals, two younger adults, two middle-aged adults, and one older adult, who was tasked with developing several broad categories that applied to all good leaders. The three broad categories that they agreed upon were practical wisdom, knowledge, and expertise. A questionnaire was then developed and distributed to 100+ participants (and their parents and grandparents) enrolled in Business or Communication courses at large Southern University in the United States. The following demographic information about the sample was collected: gender, age, ethnicity, country of origin, student enrollment classification, academic major, and work experience.

**Instrumentation:** The survey for this study was composed of two major parts. The first section was comprised of questions about demographic information. The final section of the questionnaire asked the participants to give characteristics of a good leader on the three broad classifications: practical wisdom, knowledge and expertise. The characteristics were then put into larger categories. The efficacy of these categories was analyzed using both inter-coder reliability and Cohen's Lambda.

## **Discussion:**



In this study, participants seemingly demonstrated several differences in their classifications of leader behaviors. There were differences between the specificity and diversity of respondents based on age and experience. Older adults seemed to have more cognitively complex understanding than did younger individuals. Individuals with more work experiences also had a more diverse set of classifications for leaders than did those with less experience.

#### Conclusion:

Good managers and leaders are essential to the success of any business. With the myriad theories of leadership that articulate divergent ideals of leadership, organizations can find understanding what characteristics incredibly confusing. The money spent on hiring good corporate leaders can prove to be a future windfall or a death knell. Because leadership research is so fragmented, small studies that consider the relative impact of specific characteristics might prove valuable for understanding the what to look for in a good leader in corporations in the United States.

# **Promoting Cross-functional Team Interactions within General Business Classes**

**Christopher McKenna, Stephen F. Austin State University**

## **Abstract**

If we as educators aim to prepare our students operating within teams after graduation, then one of the elements of teamwork only infrequently integrated into classrooms involves managing cross-team dependencies. Students tend to lack practical exposure to the interactions needed to produce shared deliverables within a project whose scope exceeds what can be produced by a single functional (or “unitary”) team.

Recent scholarship on academic-based team projects suggests a potential gap in promoting such skills within general business courses. For instance, contemporary case studies on the role of virtual teams within online engineering projects (Brewer et al., 2015) and the impact of cultural factors on team effectiveness (Levitt, 2015; Grubel, 2016; Gonzalez-Perez et al., 2014) have examined the ability of individual teams and their members to bridge cultural, linguistic, and communication-technology divides, rather than the multi-team production of a meta-scaled deliverable.

Moreover, whether promoted during undergraduate—or more commonly, graduate—courses, research-based initiatives sometimes encourage group collaborations when producing co-authored articles for publication (as in Copenheaver et al., 2015). In these efforts, however, students often select their roles during the article-creation process, perhaps as field researchers, drafters, serial revisers, and so on. Yet these projects tend not to place students in pre-defined functional roles (as might be true within a business setting), nor do they explicitly require formal process steps and handoffs to pass “published” units of work from one functional team—as would be needed within a disciplined experiential learning process producing a solution designed for client signoff. Though certainly some research case studies have interrogated methods for promoting cross-functional teamwork within organizations (as in Ehrhardt et al., 2014), it’s not clear that classroom pedagogy tends to implement either rigorous cross-functional training or feedback. So even if, at times, peer evaluations and instructorial comments are leveraged to influence the development of individual team-project deliverables (as in Canboy et al., 2016), how can business educators structure and manage classrooms requiring students to engage in the iterative artifact creation, revision, and approval processes common within change-management efforts? And perhaps more importantly, how and where can students experience debating and/or redefining critical scoping issues or resolving open items across multiple teams seeking to produce outcome beyond what’s possible within a given work-team’s purview?

Though efforts involving interdisciplinary teams developing capstone projects show some experiential promise, they often face significant challenges to identify appropriate projects, to administer such courses, and to secure project mentors (Jiji et al., 2015). However, these typically “interdisciplinary” teams involve rosters often derive from member sub-populations possessing distinct disciplinary (and often specialist or technical) skills. Thus, such teams represent a collection of subject matter experts (SMEs) who essentially require collaborative and organizational support to succeed. Yet in the case of cross-functional teams in general business classrooms, most team members possess largely the same set of skills and content knowledge. As such, these teams may lack the confidence to accomplish the aggressive project objectives whose elements may be more familiar to interdisciplinary SMEs.

So even as some strong work continues to explore, for instance, the nature of cross-team collaboration among students in remote locations projects involving a combination of business and engineering students (as in Adya et al., 2015 and 2008), the author faces the challenge of implementing macro-level cross-functional projects within an undergraduate population possessing limited technology skills within a more generic business-education classroom. Moreover, given the face-to-face nature of student interactions, participants tend to encounter instantaneous cross-team communication and productivity challenges unmitigated by any significant extent by distance or language or cultural difference.

In short, the author sought to introduce students to the problems of working through an iterative systems-development process in which the unitary functional teams needed to act in concert to produce a project deliverable larger than a single team could produce on its own. In so doing, the author sought to mimic the mutually reinforcing and synergistic development processes common within divisional or enterprise-scoped change initiatives. The preliminary results of this classroom experiment form the basis of the presentation thus being proposed.

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# **Thinking Visually: Students Connect Textual and Visual Resources in Business Communication**

**Lindsay Camille Clark, Sam Houston State University**

Abstract: Hyland (2011) claims that texts produced in the digital age are never exclusively text-based and involve “different semiotic resources, which, in combination, create new meanings” (p. 292). As technology continues to influence communication, it is increasingly important for instructors “to provide students the opportunities of developing expertise with all available means of persuasion and expression” (Selfe, 2009, p. 618). In this presentation, I will explore students’ composing processes in a business presentation course. Specifically, I will examine how these students seem to make connections between the intention of their textual information and the meaning of visual resources afforded by technology. Using student reflections and assignments collected during the course, as well my pedagogical reflections, I will examine the ways students’ communicative decision-making may be influenced by technology, particularly their understanding of the relationship between textual and visual artifacts. I will also consider the emergent opportunities and challenges instructors face when guiding students to communicate using technological resources. I will also discuss how these experiences might inform future curricular changes that scaffold students’ digital literacy and critical thinking skills. Finally, I will discuss and invite responses to the following questions: How do we negotiate teaching textual and technological components? What opportunities and challenges are possible for developing new activities and assignments? How can technology inform new assignments that build students’ digital communication literacy and foster collaboration across business disciplines?

## Poster Presentations

This year's poster presentations for ABC include:

### **A Medium-Size Impact on a Huge Class with a Small Budget: Teaching Business Writing in a Required Interdisciplinary Sophomore-Year Course**

**Bonnie Auslander**, University of Colorado Boulder

**August Ridley**, University of Colorado Boulder

**Margot "Kiki" Adams**, University of Colorado Boulder

**Rachel Austerfjord**, University of Colorado Boulder

Recruiters continually press business schools to send them graduates with better writing skills, but can improved writing be taught in a huge core course with a small budget? The answer: a cautious yes. This poster paper reports on University of Colorado at Boulder's pilot attempt to infuse business writing in a required core cross-disciplinary sophomore-year course that serves over 1,000 students a year.

### **Meeting the Leadership Communication Skills of our Students**

**Carol S. Wright**, Stephen F. Austin State

**S. Ann Wilson**, Stephen F. Austin State

This exploratory study examines students' perceptions of the communication skills most desired of leaders and whether these students feel they possess these. This study reviews the current literature on leadership communication, and present students' perception of these required skills. Findings from this study will be used to improve courses focused on leadership and executive communication.